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Ralph
McInerny

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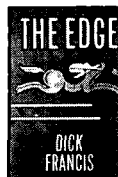
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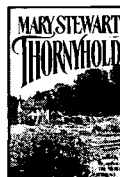
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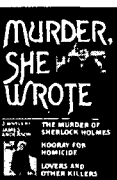
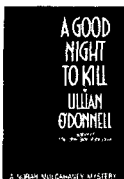
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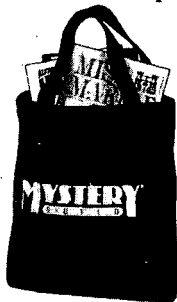
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Every year about this time we bring you the winners—as well as the nominees in all categories—of the Edgar Allan Poe Awards, given annually by the Mystery Writers of America. This year we are *especially* pleased about the list, as it concerns the short story, for stories that appeared in AHMM garnered four of the five nominations for Best Short Story, and one of them, Bill Crenshaw's "Flicks," took the prize for Best. We are very proud of all of them, and proud to have been their publisher. The list follows, with the winners in bold-face type.

BEST SHORT STORY OF 1988:

"Flicks" by Bill Crenshaw
(AHMM, August 1988)

"Déjà Vu" by Doug Allyn
(AHMM, June 1988)

"Bridey's Caller" by Judith O'Neill (AHMM, May 1988)

"Incident in a Neighborhood Tavern" by Bill Pronzini (*An Eye for Justice*)

"The Alley" by Stephen Wasylyk (AHMM, November 1988)

BEST NOVEL OF 1988:

***A Cold Red Sunrise* by Stuart M. Kaminsky** (Scribners)

***Sacrificial Ground* by Thomas H. Cook** (Putnam)

***Joey's Case* by K. C. Constantine** (Mysterious Press)

***A Thief of Time* by Tony Hillerman** (Harper & Row)

***In the Lake of the Moon* by David L. Lindsey** (Atheneum)

BEST FIRST NOVEL BY AN AMERICAN AUTHOR OF 1988:

***Carolina Skeletons* by David Stout** (Mysterious Press)

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Holly Garrison**, Managing Editor; **Judy Downer**, Editorial Assistant; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Terri Czezko**, Associate Art Director; **Robert Texter**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Junior Designer; **Carole Dixon**, Production Director; **Judy S. Brown**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Christian Dorbandt**, Marketing and Subsidiary Rights Manager; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Sonya C. Buckman**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **Susan Greene**, Newsstand Promotion Manager; **Brian McKeon**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Lisa Feerick**, Advertising Services Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher (New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114).

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- Murder Once Done* by Mary Lou Bennett (Perseverance)
The Murder of Frau Schütz by J. Madison Davis (Walker)
A Great Deliverance by Elizabeth George (Bantam)
Julian Solo by Shelly Reuben (Dodd Mead)
- The Lamp from the Warlock's Tomb* by John Bellaire (Dial)
Is Anybody There? by Eve Bunting (Lippincott)
Following the Mystery Man by Mary Downing Hahn (Clarion)

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL NOVEL OF 1988:

- The Telling of Lies* by Timothy Findley (Dell)
Judgment by Fire by Fredrick D. Huebner (Fawcett)
A Radical Departure by Lia Matera (Bantam)
Trapdoor by Keith Peterson (Bantam)
Preacher by Ted Thackrey, Jr. (Jove)

BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL OF 1988:

- Incident at Loring Groves* by Sonia Levitin (Dial)
The Falcon Sting by Barbara Brenner (Bradbury)
Second Fiddle by Ronald Kidd (Lodestar-Dutton)
Shadow in the North by Philip Pullman (Knopf)
The Accident by Todd Strasser (Delacorte)

BEST JUVENILE OF 1988:

- Megan's Island* by Willo Davis Roberts (Atheneum)
Something Upstairs by Avi (Orchard)

BEST FACT CRIME OF 1988:

- In Broad Daylight* by Harry N. MacLean (Harper & Row)
Family of Spies: Inside the John Walker Spy Ring by Pete Earley (Bantam)
The Cocaine Wars by Paul Eddy with Hugo Sabogal and Sara Walden (Norton)
Monkey on a Stick by John Hubner and Lindsey Gruson (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich)
A Gathering of Saints by Robert Lindsey (Simon & Schuster)

BEST CRITICAL/BIOGRAPHICAL WORK OF 1988:

- Cornell Woolrich: First You Dream, Then You Die* by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. (Mysterious Press)
The Dime Detectives by Ron Goulart (Mysterious Press)
Silk Stalkings: When Women Write of Murder by Victoria Nichols and Susan Thompson (Black Lizard)
Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel by Maureen T. Reddy (Continuum)

BEST MOTION PICTURE OF 1988:

***The Thin Blue Line*, no author, directed by Errol Morris (Miramax)**

***Die Hard*, screenplay by Jeb Stuart and Steven E. deSousa, based on the novel *Nothing Lasts Forever* by Roderick Thorpe (20th Century Fox)**

***A Fish Called Wanda*, screenplay by John Cleese, story by John Cleese and Charles Crichton (MGM)**

***Masquerade*, screenplay by Executive Producer Dick Wolfe (MGM)**

***Things Change*, screenplay by David Mamet and Shel Silverstein (Columbia)**

BEST TELEVISION FEATURE OF 1988:

***Man Against the Mob*, written by David J. Kinghorn (NBC)**

***She Was Marked for Murder*, written by David Stenn (NBC)**

***A Whisper Kills*, written by John Robert Bensink (ABC)**

BEST EPISODE IN A TELEVISION SERIES OF 1988:

"The Devil's Foot" by Gary Hopkins (adapted from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), *Mystery!*, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (WGBH-TV)

"The Black Tower, Episode 1" by William Humble (adapted from P. D. James), *Mystery!*, *The Black Tower* (WGBH-TV)

"Date with an Angel" by David J. Burke and Stephen Kronish, *Wiseguy* (CBS)

"May the Road Rise Up" by Richard C. Okie, *Simon & Simon* (CBS)

"Rumpole and the Bright Seraphim" by John Mortimer, *Mystery!*, *Rumpole of the Bailey* (WGBH-TV)

This year a special Edgar was voted for Joan Kahn, a notable mystery editor presently at St. Martin's but retiring this spring, for her lifetime achievement in the field, and a Raven was awarded to Bouchercon, for its own contribution, presented to Phyllis White, Anthony Boucher's widow. The Ellery Queen Award was voted for Richard Levinson and William Link; the Grand Master Award was presented to Hillary Waugh. The Robert L. Fish Memorial Award, for the Best First Mystery Short Story, went to Linda O. Johnston for "Different Drummers" (EQMM, July 1988).

And so, congratulations to everyone—but particularly, of course, to Messrs. Crenshaw, Allyn, and Wasylyk and Ms. O'Neill!

FICTION



Killing Howard

by Ralph McInerny

Illustration by Mark Fresh

6
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Walter Map did not decide lightly to become a murderer. The idea was repulsive to him. The intended deed would be unlike any deed he had performed in the previous twenty-seven years of his existence. He was a gentle man. He was a man on whose escutcheon might have been emblazoned *Vivre et laissez vivre*. He was ambitious without being competitive. Indeed, his character had been called noble by none other than Lorraine Kelso in computing only months before. Walter had been flattered by the judgment, all the more so because his estimate of Lorraine ran to the wildest of superlatives, no matter the inadequacy of anything he had as yet managed to say to her. Their paths had converged, they got along splendidly, they had ignored several movies together, transported by the feel of the other's hand. Moreover, just twice, Walter had chastely pressed his lips to Lorraine's. There are moments when the thought of death is, if not welcome, nonetheless tolerable. What greater bliss could await him in this vale of tears than the kiss of Lorraine Kelso? See Naples and die. On the other hand, being separated from her was productive of an almost exquisite pain. In the offices of Cook, Baker and Was-

sermann, Walter would steal from his desk hourly to catch a glimpse of Lorraine at her terminal. And, oh, the languorous look in her eyes when they rose to meet his! The message was as plain as electronic mail. Walter had done some computing of his own. His calculations matched the impulse of his heart. He would most definitely propose marriage to Lorraine.

That is how things had been until five weeks ago when the ineffable Howard Cook, son of a senior partner, arrived fresh from college to be put on the fast track to promotion. Howard had surveyed the women in the office as if they represented a portion of his inheritance. He produced a flutter when he sauntered through the departments, somehow always more interested in the tasks of the female employees. He had, it seemed, a weakness for computing. It became his practice to query Lorraine Kelso on this and that.

"What a nuisance he must be to you," Walter opined while enjoying a midafternoon yogurt with Lorraine. Consuming this wholesome food had been postponed several times because of Howard Cook's importuning of Lorraine.

"He is determined to learn the business from the ground up."

"Then he should be in the basement talking with the head of maintenance."

"He certainly doesn't know much about computers." Lorraine's hair bounced as she shook her head, but there was a forgiving smile on her lips, all the redder now with raspberry yogurt.

"Does he know anything?"

"Walter, he is here to learn."

"That is why some of us went to school. If we hadn't, we would not have been hired."

"It's not Howie's fault his father is a senior partner."

"Howie?"

"Aren't we talking about him?"

Indeed, they were. Wasting the break talking about something other than themselves. But it was too late to change gear. It was time to return to work.

"There is a great movie at the mall tonight."

"Walter, I can't!"

He was struck dumb. She had never turned him down before. He tried to take her hand, but she gripped her yogurt container with both hands and stepped back. Surely only a serious illness in her immediate family could explain her refusal. She turned and ran off to the computing department. Poor darling, she was obviously overcome with emotion. He

would not phone her at her terminal. He would wait until five and ask if there was anything he might do for her during this trying period.

When he went to computing at five, he found Lorraine huddled with Howard Cook. The other employees of the department were gone or on their way, but Lorraine was clearly in mid-lesson with the son of a senior partner. Walter backed down the hall toward the elevators. To try to extricate her from the slow-learning heir apparent might only prolong her agony. He decided it was best that she give the young man a crash course and have done with him.

But days passed and the lessons continued. It became almost impossible for Walter to have a minute with Lorraine. An unwelcome thought occurred to him. Lorraine was *enjoying* acting as tutor. Dread precedents flew through his mind. Abelard and Heloise. Francesca and Paolo. He tried to scoff at the idea. What could be less romantic than computing? But Abelard had been teaching his soon-to-be-beloved logic.

Distraction from these melancholy thoughts came in the form of a summons from the senior Cook. He was a stumpy, red-faced man on the top of

whose head twenty-seven hairs were carefully arranged. It had never before struck Walter how unattractive a man Cook was. No doubt his son would end up with the same porcine appearance. Howard might be an Adonis now, but a life of ease and affluence lay ahead of him and he was almost certain to crumble under the strain.

"You are doing excellent work, Walter."

"Thank you, sir."

"You deserve a raise and you shall have a raise. You shall have a promotion, too. I am moving you to this floor, young man. I want you to head up a team studying ways in which the firm can expand. Are you married?"

"Not yet."

"That suggests you have plans."

"Well, I have hopes."

"Go for her, Walter. Faint heart never won fair lady."

Walter left Cook's office in a state of exhilaration. What news to share with Lorraine! He would propose to her at the very first opportunity. He went directly to the computing room. Lorraine was not there. She was in the employees' dining room, seated across the table from Howard Cook. They were holding hands. Her eyes looked into Howard's as they had often looked into his. The signifi-

cance of the scene seemed unmistakable. Walter withdrew in confusion.

He sat at his desk and suddenly felt a great calm come over him. In the space of minutes, he had gone from the heights to the depths. Success was ashes in his mouth without Lorraine to share it with. Something had come between them. Someone. Howard Cook. Howard must be removed. Vying with Howard's charm would take time, winning Lorraine back from this wily seducer would not be easy. And what if he failed? The thought could not be borne. The idea of a universe minus Howard Cook exerted a strong attraction. He realized he meant to get rid of Howard. To kill him. Murder him.

Somehow the realization did not shock him. He must be simply catching up with a resolution already made unconsciously. In any case, the die was cast. The only question was how.

No need to review the care with which Walter considered the variety of means available to him. His research brought home to him how vulnerable humans are. All men are mortal. A necessary truth, but it can be verified in countless ways. Poison detained him for nearly twenty-four hours; it

definitely had attractions. Walter smiled as he read descriptions of the agonized expiring of the poisoned. But finally he waved it all away. Simple violence would be best. Push Howard off a building, shove him in front of a train, hit him with a blow on the head. No firearms, no weapons in any usual sense.

A less determined man might have felt uneasy making such plans in an office next to the proposed victim's father. Walter had moved to the top floor, two doors down the hall from Cook senior. He had accepted with pain in his heart and a brave smile on his lips Lorraine's congratulations. She looked as if she had received a similar promotion. That night he watched her drive away with Howard in his obscenely ostentatious red sports car. Walter's smile returned. He had selected his weapon. The red sports car would be the instrument of Howard Cook's death.

A few hours spent in the library poring over Porsche manuals sufficed. A few minutes' work on the steering and the Porsche would become a time bomb, ready to render the racing wheel Howard gripped with leather driving gloves inoperative. In a moment of forgetfulness, he thought of telling Lorraine what he had learned. Among her many charms was

an interest in and knowledge of the mechanical unusual in a woman. Again, Walter was struck by how easily and by how many ways death can come. The Cook mansion was in a mountainous area. A mile after leaving the house, the road became twisting and precipitous. A driver who could not control his car on that road was not long for this world.

That night clad all in black, his face wearing a layer of burnt cork, carrying only a wrench of the appropriate size, Walter approached the Cook property from above, having parked his car where lovers did what lovers do. Walter felt he was striking a blow for them all in ridding the world of his rival for the heart of Lorraine Kelso.

A half mile above the house, he was stopped by the sound of barking. Ferocious barking. What must have been an extended family of German shepherds set up a wall of terrifying noise. Walter had been frightened as a child by a neighborhood dog. He turned and crept back to his car. As he was leaving the area, a state police car drove in and Walter turned his blackened face away, apparently in time.

The following morning when he was shaving he heard on the news that a car belonging to Howard Cook, Jr., son of How-

ard Cook, Sr., had gone out of control on a mountain road. Young Cook had managed to get out of the vehicle before it plunged into a valley and burned.

Walter turned off his razor and reviewed the previous night. He had not gone through with his plan. He had not fixed the steering system of Howard's Porsche so it would fail. He sought and found another station and heard the story again. Howard Cook had said his brakes failed and he could not control the speed of the car. Puzzled, Walter went off to work.

Cook senior did not come in that morning. Lorraine did not respond when he called her terminal. The head of her department said she had phoned in and taken a sick day. Needless to say, young Howard was not on the premises. At noon, Walter left the building for lunch and to buy an early edition of the paper. Munching a burger that tasted awful and would take a long-term toll on his health, he read that there was evidence of tampering with the hydraulic fluid lines of Howard's brakes.

"Someone tried to kill my son," Cook senior said that afternoon. He spoke in awed tones. The thought that the universe might be hostile to

him or his loved ones seemed new to him.

"His brakes were tampered with?"

"There's no doubt about it. He's lucky to be alive."

Walter nodded in agreement, but Howard must now face another attempt, Walter's.

"I do not want to hire private detectives, Walter."

"Why should you?"

"To find out who tried to kill my son."

"That's what the police are paid for, sir."

"I'm also paying you. Walter, I like your mind. I like its versatility. How long have you been up here? A few days, yet already you are generating results. Why should I pay some dolt of a detective when I have a mind like yours in my employ?"

"Any dolt of a detective would know more than I do."

"At the moment, yes. But I wager that in days you will know more than all of them put together."

"You want me to find the one who tried to kill Howard?"

"I'll put it in writing. I'll give you carte blanche. Spare no expense. I want that maniac behind bars."

Back at his desk, Walter reflected that there must be someone other than himself who wanted Howard dead. This did

not really surprise him. He could imagine battalions of people who despised Howard Cook. But only one of them had tampered with the brakes of the Porsche. Who might it be? Would the assassin give up after this failure, or could he be relied on to try again and next time do it right?

Walter did not intend to wait. Howard was still in the hospital, under observation. Lorraine was at his bedside. Cook senior had not mentioned her by name, only that she was a young woman in computing. He sounded as if her salary covered sitting by Howard's hospital bed.

At three in the afternoon, Walter went to the county building and studied the plans of the hospital. He telephoned and asked for the number of Howard Cook's room. It was with a calm and determined mind that he drove to the hospital, parked, went inside, and put through a call to Howard's room. The phone was answered by Lorraine. Muffling his voice with a handkerchief, he identified himself as Mr. Cook and instructed Lorraine to call him back from a pay phone in the main waiting room of the hospital. He hung up on her confused protest.

He stepped unseen into the elevator from which she

emerged and rose to Howard's floor. His plan was simple. He would either strangle or smother the man. He came out of the elevator into pandemonium. White-clad figures were running down the hallway, pushing and pulling various pieces of equipment. They seemed to be converging on what, if his study of the floor plan was correct, would be Howard's room. Walter stepped to the nurses' station where one obese angel of mercy remained.

"What's going on?"

"A code blue."

"Is that unusual?"

She looked at him. "Who are you?"

"Maynard of the *Tribune*. How do you spell your name?"

She tilted her bosom so he could read her name tag. Buonaiuto. "A code blue is emergency. Danger of death."

"What patient?"

"The Cook boy."

Walter nodded. He was trying very hard, and not too successfully, to keep his mind devoid of thought. He sauntered away from the nurses' station, opened the stairway door, and a moment later was descending at a great echoing rate. He emerged on the second floor and took the elevator to the lobby. As he was crossing to the door, Lorraine stepped out of a phone booth.

"Walter! What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you."

A pained look came over her face. "Walter, some things can't be explained . . ."

He stopped her. "You misunderstand me. I went up to look in on Howard. Apparently something has happened to him."

"He was very nearly killed last night."

"Something else just happened upstairs. A code blue?"

He watched her run across the lobby toward the elevators, and it was like watching the departure of hope. Would she, after a sensible interval, come back to him once Howard was out of the way?

Walter Map was not a drinking man. He had bored many with his account of what alcohol does to the heart and brain. He had felt tipsy once in his life, and he had not found it in the least attractive. Nonetheless, he drove from the hospital to the Kitty Korner Inn and ordered a drink.

"What kind of a drink?" The girl behind the bar had her head tilted so she could follow the drama on the television set suspended overhead.

"An alcoholic drink."

He had her attention. "You mean liquor?"

"Exactly."

She half turned, then faced him again. "Bourbon all right?"

"Do you make doubles?"

Others along the bar lost interest in the televised drama and followed the course of Walter's colloquy with the red-headed bartender. "A double bourbon," she said, as if she were talking to more than Walter.

"Can I take it to a booth?"

"I'll bring it to you."

"Thank you."

Left alone with his drink, he raised it and drank off half the contents. It did not stop the thought that had been pestering him all the way from the hospital. He turned away from the bar and mouthed the sentence soundlessly. *I have psychic powers.* What other explanation was there? He had set out to tamper with Howard's steering but had been prevented from getting to the car. Nonetheless, the brake lines were tampered with and Howard nearly had the accident Walter had intended for him. Just now he had gone to the hospital to kill Howard and before he could get to him something had gone wrong and he was in danger of death.

Sitting in the booth, Walter felt in possession of a strange and frightening power. He drained his glass. It was good. He would like some more.

"Another?"

He lurched. The redhead was standing beside him. He nodded. "Bring me two."

"You mean another double?"

"Two doubles. Do you make quadruples?"

She took it as a joke and returned laughing to her post behind the bar. Every eye in the place, no matter how blurred, followed the girl when she brought him two more drinks on her little tray.

Walter scarcely dared to formulate a wish in his mind, for fear of what might happen. He drank off his second drink in two large swallows. There was a phone booth at the back of the room. From it he telephoned the hospital and asked for Howard Cook's room. Again Lorraine answered.

"How is he?"

"They stopped the bleeding."

"Good."

"Someone pushed an IV needle into his artery, and blood just gushed from him."

Walter was almost relieved that it had not been strangling or smothering. "Someone?"

"It must be the same person."

He said nothing. The phone went dead. It was just as well. Walter felt dizzy. How much bourbon did it take to make a man drunk? His mind had become a deadly weapon and he wanted to dull it with drink.

He must have made a wish

that he would get home safely.

He woke in his own bed, not knowing how he had got there, his head pounding. His first thought was of Lorraine, perhaps because there were five different photographs of her strategically placed around his bedroom. He began to weep helplessly. In one of the dreams that had troubled his sleep, he had been explaining to Cook senior that the more he tried to kill Howard the more Lorraine loved him. He did not remember Cook senior's reply.

In the bathroom after showering he willed a towel to come to him, but nothing happened. He nearly lost his balance reaching for the towel. Seated at the kitchen table, he commanded the coffee pot to fill itself with water and brew coffee, but nothing happened. He was almost disappointed. Relief followed. He did not have psychic power. But that meant someone else had twice made an attempt on Howard Cook's life. He had been commissioned by the intended victim's father to find the one trying to kill Howard. It seemed inescapable that such a person existed.

The phone rang. It was Cook senior.

"What are you doing home?"

Walter closed one eye and read the time on the clock. "It is six forty-five A.M."

"That's right. Howard is

missing from the hospital. What am I paying you for?"

In his car, Walter realized he was not wearing shoes. He could not go back without wasting precious time. He was caught by every red light on the way to the hospital and understood why some men curse and swear. He hoped that Howard would not survive this third attempt, if that was what it was. How he wished his wishes were efficacious. Had he really believed he had psychic powers? He laughed a skeptical laugh, wondering to whom it was addressed.

A crowd had gathered near a Dumpster in the parking lot. Barefoot, Walter joined the crowd. He had recognized Lorraine in its midst. He pushed forward in time to see Howard Cook emerge from a large plastic trash bag.

"I thought I heard moaning," a man with a Jonathan-sized Adam's apple said.

"And in a hospital zone," the bony woman beside him said.

They had parked near the Dumpster and detected the sound of a human voice emanating from it. The wife had gone inside while the husband stood guard. A glum looking man in a dark blue work uniform had gone into the Dumpster to investigate. He had found the plastic bag full of Howard Cook.

Thrown out with the trash,

Walter mused. Lorraine turned and saw him. She came and stood before him and asked impatiently how long he had been there.

"What happened?"

She tipped her head to one side. Her eyes fell to his feet.

"You're barefoot!"

He put one foot modestly over the other and nearly lost his balance. The drinking of the previous day still affected him. Lorraine made a noise and went up to the little man in the dark blue work uniform. He shook his head. She straightened and spoke to him once more. A moment later, the fellow disappeared into the Dumpster. Lorraine stood expectantly next to it.

The head looked over the rim of the Dumpster's opening. "What kind of shoes are they?"

Walter closed the distance between them and took her arm. "Lorraine . . ."

She shook free from his hand. Not looking him in the eye, she said in a fierce whisper, "The state police saw your car in a parking lot for lovers above the Cook property."

"I was alone. I swear it."

She looked piteously at him, seemed about to speak, then did not. Had she ever looked more beautiful? She was a shy flower in the morning dew.

"Lorraine, I love you."

She took his hand. "I know."

"But you love Howard . . ."

Before he could make a noble renunciation, she shook her head violently. "I can't talk to you now."

A stretcher on wheels arrived and Howard was put on it. Lorraine, casting a glance at Walter, joined the parade as Howard was pushed back to the hospital. Walter stood barefoot and open-mouthed. How strangely Lorraine had acted. And no wonder.

She suspected him. If anyone in the world knew he had a motive, it was Lorraine Kelso. Furthermore, she had a logical mind. The report of the state police put him in the neighborhood when Howard's car was tampered with. Yesterday he had been in the hospital when someone shoved an IV needle into Howard's artery. And here he was this morning when a third attempt had been made on Howard's life. What else could she think?

"These yours?"

The man in dark blue was displaying a beat up pair of white shoes.

"You can have them."

As he drove away, there was a thudding sound. In the rear view mirror he saw a white shoe lying on the asphalt. Strange.

If Lorraine had a logical mind, so did Walter. She might sus-

pect him because he was in the vicinity each time someone had tried to do away with her odious beloved. He had the advantage of knowing he was innocent. Someone else had had an even better opportunity than he had. That was when the penny dropped. Good grief, of course. Lorraine.

She had been with Howard in his car the day before his accident. She was fully capable of starting a slow leak of brake fluid; perhaps had worked out on her computer how many miles he must drive before he would once more be coming down the mountain. She had just left his hospital room before Howard was found half bleeding to death. And now the plastic bag in a Dumpster.

It all fit. Except for one thing. She had no motive. Why would she kill the man she had learned to love? These thoughts puzzled Walter and made his driving erratic, but he was scarcely aware of the angry horns, of the empurpled faces of those with whom he had managed not to collide. He stopped at his apartment and put on some shoes and continued to the office. But he was stopped in the hallway by Cook senior, looking so angry he might have been one of Walter's fellow motorists.

"Well, Mr. Smartypants?"

Cook senior said in sarcastic tones. "Have you found out who is trying to kill my only son?"

"Could we step into your office?"

"Try and avoid it."

Walter strolled across the plush carpet of the senior partner's office. At some moment between slipping into his loafers and now he had made up his mind.

"I shall want a few others here before I speak."

"Oh, no you don't. No teasing. Who is it, you?" An evil smile crept over the piglike countenance of Mr. Cook.

"You say that because my car was seen in a lover's lane above your property."

"Aha. The state police have contacted you."

"Not at all. They are as anxious as I to keep the name of my companion out of this."

"You were with someone!"

Walter dropped his eyes.

"Who was she?"

"Mr. Cook, I could never command your respect again if I divulged her name." He had crossed his fingers and did not conceal the fact, but Cook did not notice. He was obviously impressed by such chivalry.

"I'm sorry, Walter."

"I shall want your son and Miss Kelso here when I reveal the assassin's name."

"You know who it is?"

Walter showed a palm as sign of his adamant resolve to say nothing until there was an appropriate gathering for the revelation. Cook lit a filthy cigar and picked up his phone, into which he barked a series of peremptory orders.

"Do you have another of those?"

"I didn't know you smoked, Walter."

"I am thinking of having a baby."

A few seconds passed before the remark drew a senior partner type of chuckle. Cook handed Walter two of the massive cigars, and he slipped them into his pocket.

It was not twenty minutes before Lorraine and Howard arrived in the battle grey stretch limousine Cook had sent to fetch them. Lorraine coughed because of the smoke, and tears ran from her eyes. Walter found it pleasant to fancy that she wept for him.

"Walter Map has discovered who has been trying to kill you, Howard. I have called you here to hear him reveal the culprit's name."

"Walter, you mustn't!" Lorraine started toward him, but Cook senior stopped her. Walter smiled at her. She need not worry. If she did not yet know the depths of his love, she would learn them now.

"Who did it?" Howard asked with more a sneer than a smile.

Walter stood. "You did."

Howard laughed. His father shouted a word he should not have shouted with Lorraine present. It was doubtful that she heard it. With a fluttering cry, she sank into a chair.

"Get serious, Map," Howard said.

"I am quite serious."

Cook senior went behind his great desk, sat, and laid his fat hands on the blotter. "Clear out your desk, Walter."

"Hear me out. I realize this startles you. All of you but Howard, I mean. Actually, the solution is quite simple. Three attempts were made on Howard's life. We are all agreed on that. The presumption is that all three attempts were made by the same person. Very well. This entails that the killer be on the premises on each of the three occasions. There is only one person who fits that description. Howard Cook."

Cook senior hit his head with a popping sound. "Of course the victim has to be at the scene of the crime, you idiot. That doesn't make him guilty."

"Good point," Walter conceded. "But only if someone else fills the necessary requirement of being there."

"I do," Lorraine said in a small voice.

"No!" Walter cried. "You don't."

"She was always there at that," Cook senior said, getting to his feet and glowering at Lorraine.

"So was I!" Walter shouted. This was not going as he had planned.

Lorraine leapt to her feet, came to him, and began to beat on his chest with her little fists. "I did it, Walter. I did."

"There is only one flaw in that, my dear. You love Howard."

The last named emitted a strange sound. Walter turned to see the son of the senior partner sink into a chair. He looked at his father, he looked at Lorraine, he looked at Walter, and there was despair in his face. Where was the insolent young puppy who had stolen Lorraine from him?

"I did it. It was the only thing that worked," the young man said in abject tones.

"What in blazes are you saying?" his father demanded.

"I told her I would kill myself if she did not return my love. For weeks the threat alone worked, but she was beginning to doubt me. I had to make her think I was serious. So I pretended to have an accident."

"You destroyed your own car!"

"Dad, it had twelve thousand miles on it. In the hospital, we

talked about it, and Lorraine knew too much about cars for comfort. I made another attempt with the needle, making sure I would be rescued. The plastic bag was meant to seal it. Then she would know I would destroy myself if she would not have me."

Lorraine had stood and was gazing at Walter. Their eyes locked and they were drawn together like two wraiths in Dante. She came into his arms, and Walter found her eminently embraceable.

"These past weeks have been hellish, Walter, but I just could not have his blood on my hands."

"That is where we differ," Walter murmured.

Behind them a loud quarrel went on between father and son. It seemed a good time to leave. Arm in arm they went to Walter's office where he began to clean out his desk. Cook senior came in five minutes later and put a stop to it.

"Nonsense," he cried. "I spoke in passion. Of course you will stay. It is Howard who is going. And there will be another bonus for your detective work. Is this the girl you intend to marry?"

Walter turned to Lorraine. She nodded vigorously..

"Oh, yes," she cried. "Yes."

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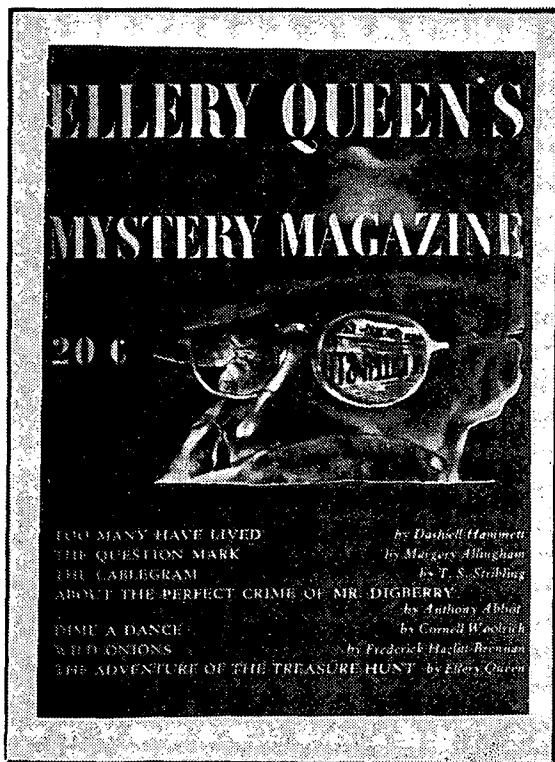
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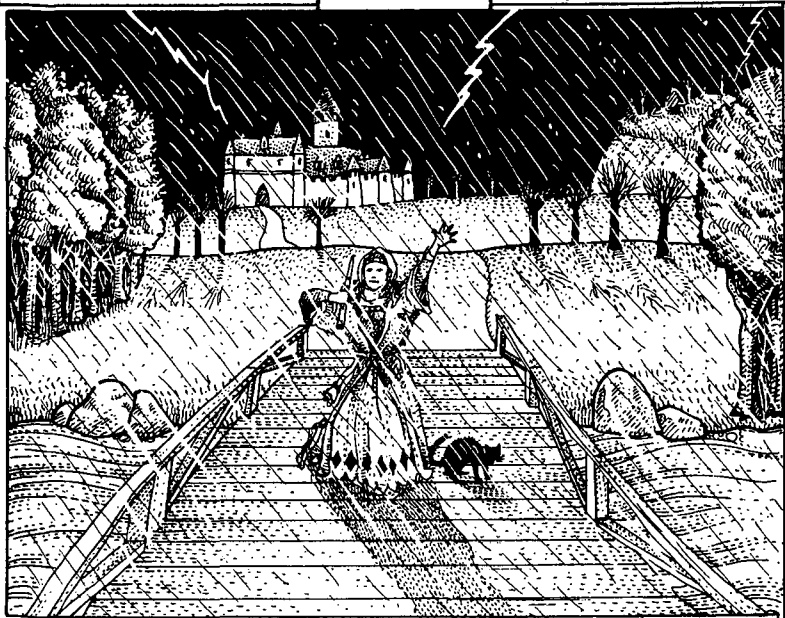
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AH6

FICTION



Zitina the Princess

by Dan Crawford

Polijn mashed herself against the doorjamb for what shelter that would give her, and pounded on the worn wooden door. At the time, it had seemed a good idea to try her luck in the Northern Quilt,

but now that she was here, she understood that spring didn't advance as quickly here as it did down south.

Back there, the roads and the weather were much better. Of course, for that very reason, the

south was already packed with traveling songsmiths. In the north, people were more desperate for entertainment after a long winter cooped up with themselves, and would pay, she had heard, unbelievable amounts for good singing. Either Polijn didn't sing as well as she thought, or she had fallen like an innocent for another minstrel's fable.

Heavy clanking sounds reached her from inside, and she pulled back into the freezing rain as the door opened. "Who is it?" roared a big, bellying man, just the sort of person for a gatewarden. "Who's. . ."

He caught sight of Polijn. "Oh!" he said. "Do come in, er, your ladyship."

He stepped aside to let her pass. As Polijn stepped into the room beyond, four sentries who'd been sitting at the fire came to attention. She was a little surprised, but she had already learned that even a lone, small, rain-draggled minstrel was accorded respect in these backwoods manors. It was different in the more civilized lands, where "real" minstrels were men who traveled with servants and a retinue, and sometimes couldn't carry a tune.

The gatewarden locked the door of the gatehouse again and came over to Polijn, by the fire. "Your ladyship will want to go

right on in," he said.

Actually, Polijn would have been glad of a chance to sit and dry off a bit first. Still, it was her rule never to contradict anyone unless it was a matter of life or worse. She turned to follow the man in.

He declined to be followed. "This way, your ladyship," he said, bowing and indicating a narrow corridor.

These big, noisy men sometimes had crude senses of humor, but it was generally best to let them have their joke and be done with it. Not without misgivings, Polijn stepped ahead of him into the narrow passage.

But no trap was sprung. She glanced over her shoulder to find him following at a deferential distance, a look of great self-consciousness on his face. Shrugging, she hurried ahead into a rain-slashed courtyard.

Once they had reached the main body of the castle, more sentries sprang to attention. "If your ladyship will wait here," the gatewarden began, "I shall . . ."

He bounced, or was pushed, to one side, and his place was taken by a short, round woman who looked Polijn up and down with burning eyes. Many of the torches in the hall had been extinguished for the night, but Polijn could see black hair bound in a bun on the woman's head, and a forehead grooved with a

deep frown. She looked like the type of woman who had been born with those fists on her hips.

"Welcome!" barked the woman, sounding none too sincere about it.

But Polijn had met housekeepers aplenty. "Thank you, my lady, and good evening," she replied. "What a pleasure it is to be in your country!" She did not mention what country it was because she didn't know. That was why they called this land the Northern Quilt; it was a patchwork assembly of petty nations with constantly shifting borders. The farmers who lived on the land generally weren't sure who owned it, but the people up in the castles tended to be a little more touchy about the matter.

So Polijn had learned to be imprecise in the name of geniality. But the plan had never succeeded this well before. To her considerable alarm, Polijn found herself being hugged, dripping cape and all, by the sturdy little woman. Then, only partially releasing the grip, the woman turned to the sentries and snapped, "Don't just stand there, you bunch of loobies! Spread the news! The Princess Zitina has arrived at last!"

"Princess . . ." Polijn began, but was smothered in another hug.

"Now," the woman said, once

she allowed Polijn to catch her breath again, "you must come to the throneroom at once. My son is fainting to meet you."

Polijn was dragged forward across the floor. "Your . . ." she began.

"Yes," the woman replied, "I am Queen Thythian, but you mustn't be afraid of your mamma-in-law. Oh! I told them all you would come! Spring is the time for weddings, not high summer, with all that heat, and the flies. Oh! Sometimes they don't look out the window at all, I think. As if a little rain would have bothered a noblewoman like you!"

"I . . ." Polijn began.

The sentence was choked off with what was apparently meant as a light, affectionate squeeze. "Oh, but I told them: I told them! You'd arrive tonight, bridge or no bridge. The daughter of the King of Laramis is a warrior maiden, I said, not some shrinking thing with silken drawers. You out-rode them all, I fancy. No doubt your cowardly retinue turned back when they saw the bridge, but you, true horsewoman that you are, jumped the river and hurried on to meet us."

Polijn smiled a little. "Actually, your majesty," she said, "I walked."

"Such a polite child!" cried the queen, dealing her another hug. "But you must learn to call

me Mamma, dear. Of course you walked! How unthinking it would have been to ride such a fine animal through this wretched mud! Prince Donnyl can learn much from you: much! Oh! Not that he's thoughtless, you know, but he's young yet: young! Here we are!"

The queen thrust Polijn into a somewhat larger room hung with expensive tapestry. Servants were still bustling around to relight the wall torches, while some of the assembled courtiers adjusted quickly-donned finery.

A herald opened his mouth, but the queen gave him a shove and announced, in some triumph, "Her Majesty, your future queen, the Princess Zitina!"

Two trumpeters blasted out a fanfare, not quite in unison, as the whole court did homage. The only holdout was a somewhat undernourished young man who stepped out of the crowd, subjected Polijn to a goggle-eyed scrutiny, and announced, "She's dripping wet."

"Oh!" said the queen, in half a laugh and half a shriek. "Almighty help us if you ever meet a mermaid! You'll humiliate us. Humiliate us!" She turned to Polijn. "This is His Highness Prince Donnyl, your groom."

The prince was of medium height, with a frail, tentative mustache that went perfectly

with his face. He did dress well, his hat sprinkled with purple feathers, his black leather waistcoat blazing with a swirling pattern picked out in blue and white thread. A short sword hung at his hip; purely decorative, Polijn thought.

His highness was marginally more critical. "But look at her clothes!" he exclaimed to his mother.

"Oh!" she snapped. "Just because *you* think *your* parents are made of gold doesn't mean everyone in the world wears their brocades out in the rain!"

Prince Donnyl was not consoled by this and was craning his neck around for another angle. "I don't think she even *is* Zitina," he said. "How could anyone with legs that skinny be a horsewoman?"

Polijn felt this would be a good time to try to explain things, but when she opened her mouth, all anyone heard was the two mismatched trumpets. Prince Donnyl's father was making his entrance.

Everyone turned toward the door, bowing, curtsying. Polijn decided to go whole hog and kneel, hoping someone would notice that this was hardly the act of a princess. But the queen, after the briefest of dips, dashed across the room to her husband's side.

"Your majesty," she demanded, "you arranged this

marriage. Tell your lubberly son that this is truly the Princess Zitina."

The king was a robust, red-haired individual with broad shoulders and worried eyes. He glanced from his wife to the sopping Polijn and cleared his throat. "Er," he began.

The queen pushed off from him and bobbed back across to Polijn's side. "No," she concluded. "If he won't believe me, he certainly won't believe you, either. Such a lummox!" She looked down at Polijn. "Do get up, child. I admire an attitude of respect, but really, there are important things at hand." One heavy hand waved in the direction of Prince Donnyl, who had stepped over to whisper something to one of his courtiers. "He'll be telling all of his hoodlum friends, and by morning all Spayle will be whispering that you aren't really the Princess Zitina. We must . . . Oh! The test!"

She said this in such throbbing tones of inspiration that everyone in the room turned to her with expectation and foreboding. "When I was a girl," she announced, "my father always said you could tell a true horseman—or a horsewoman—and he had a test for those who wished to be of his court. Hurry!"

Polijn found herself lifted from her knees and pulled along like a streamer behind the queen.

The rest of the court followed, debating the question.

"She can't be! Look at those legs!"

"I'd be ashamed, sir! Look at her legs, indeed!"

"That's another thing: would a princess be dressed like some traveling acrobat?"

"Maybe they do, in Laramis; it's certainly more convenient for a ride on a night like this."

It was an awfully long run to wherever it was the queen was going, and Polijn hoped her wrist wouldn't be permanently damaged. At last the monarch stopped before an iron-bound door, and released her putative daughter-in-law to pull a ring of keys from some inner pocket.

Polijn rubbed her wrist, and then jumped aside as the queen threw the door open. "Oh!" said the mistress of the castle. "Over here!" A hand clamped around Polijn's wrist again, and she was dragged inside a dark, silent room.

It was either a storeroom or the royal treasury. The queen shoved boxes and bags aside as servants tried to keep up, carrying torches. "Ah!" cried the queen.

She pulled Polijn to a stand on which sat a perfectly massive saddle, its leather dark and brilliant in the light, even where it wasn't crusted with gems. "Here!"

The queen turned to the

crowd, pulling Polijn around, and announced, "A true horse-woman can sleep in the saddle!"

"That's your test?" demanded Prince Donnyl.

"I bet she steals it," snickered someone behind him.

At the queen's glare, even the torches seemed to cower. "The Princess Zitina has no need to steal what will one day be hers by right," the queen declared. "For she is indeed the Princess Zitina, and how better to prove it than with the Royal Ceremonial Saddle?"

Looking at the saddle and estimating how far she'd have to stretch just to get aboard the thing, Polijn could think of several things better. "I'm not . . ." she began.

"Oh, don't fret, child," said the queen, patting her on the head. "It will be yours one day, after all, and I won't be offended if you sit there just this once, just to convince—" she turned to the crowd again—"certain skeptics!"

The crowd cowered again. One brave soul ventured to ask, "Which of the horses shall I bring around, your majesty?"

Her majesty threw her free hand across her forehead. "Would you disturb the horses on a night like this, you looby? It's the saddle that matters. My father always set up a mock horse in the chapel."

Polijn, whose ears were

trained, caught what the king said about the queen's father, but the queen was preoccupied. "You!" she ordered. "Fetch a flannel gown before Zitina catches her death. You three lummoxes carry the saddle to the chapel. Oh! And dust it! How long has it been since we had a parade? What must the princess think of us with our dusty saddles?"

"Well, it has been winter," Polijn sighed.

"Such a thoughtful child!" cried the queen, dispensing another hug before hauling the hapless minstrel away to the chapel.

Polijn had been undressed before, but never with quite so much reverence. Fortunately, it was less chilly in the chapel than it had been in the treasury. She had hopes for escape when the queen's women were hanging up her clothes and found her flute and slide-whistle.

"You play these?" one of the women asked.

"Yes," Polijn replied. "You see, I . . ."

Her majesty folded her hands in rapture. "A woman of culture!" She looked to her women, who nodded with great enthusiasm. "Oh! And look!" She opened the little wooden box that held Polijn's deck of cards. "She knows her numbers, as well!"

Polijn could only shake her head with amazement. "Shall I spread some pillows on the floor, your majesty?" one of the women asked.

"What for?" her majesty demanded, stepping back to admire the mock horse she had put together out of a pair of benches and four large chairs. "She doesn't intend to fall."

Polijn hoped not. Horses weren't quite that high, surely. Not in real life. Still, she supposed the queen knew something about it. The Northern Quilt was based on war, which was based on the warhorse. Anything to do with horses was the peak of human knowledge, and those who dealt with horses were the highest of human beings (except for smiths, who were ranked among the minor deities for the wonders they worked).

Polijn expected, in fact, hoped, to disgrace herself by not knowing how to mount to the saddle, but the queen dashed that, too. "Oh!" said the monarch, turning from her creation. "That gown is much too long for you! Here, you toads, lift her up."

So the tallest of the women in attendance picked up the supposed princess and set her down straddling the saddle. The queen herself leaned in to adjust the stirrups. "There! Is that short enough?"

Polijn didn't have the slight-

est idea. "Yes, your majesty. Thank you."

Fortunately, the queen was out of reach or Polijn would have suffered another hug. "I have no doubt you'd say so in any case, dear one: in any case." She made an imperceptible adjustment. "There! That's much more comfortable, isn't it?"

"Yes, your majesty," Polijn replied.

Actually, it was highly uncomfortable, and that suited Polijn perfectly. She could not allow so much as a brief closing of her eyes to betray her as a princess in the court's opinion. Polijn had no desire whatever to keep up this masquerade beyond tonight. For one thing, there was undoubtedly a real Princess Zitina somewhere, who would turn up eventually. (Polijn wished the girl luck with Prince Donnyl.) Further, she now understood herself to be in the kingdom of Spayle. Spayle was not quite the smallest kingdom in the Northern Quilt, since it did possess a castle and half a dozen farms on each side of it.

But the only reason it remained unconquered, besides a fair-to-middling cavalry, was that it was too small for the neighbor nations to concentrate full strength on with so much other military business on hand. This state of affairs could not go on forever, of course. The

dynasty was only about twenty years old, beginning with King Homuard I (and Only), formerly a colonel of cavalry for the King of Braut until he took root, as well as a wife and a castle. The kingdom would not, Polijn thought, long survive the accession of Donnyl I, and she did not intend to queen it around here until then. (Even leaving aside the fact that "Princess Zitina" would have to live with Donnyl, and his mother, until then.)

So, as they wrapped her in quilts against the cold and filed from the chapel, she planned a nightlong vigil. She knew they hadn't gone far away; a thousand points of light glittered in the far wall, indicating peep-holes. That would help.

She shifted in her place; her skin was sticking to the leather. There was an idea. She could keep moving, let them know she was uncomfortable. Of course, the easiest way to end the test was to fall off right now. But a glance at the stone floor convinced her that this would almost certainly break something, and if she were denounced as an impostor, she would need all her limbs intact.

So she settled against the high back of the ceremonial saddle. It wasn't all that uncomfortable, really. The chill started seeping from her flesh; she hadn't realized until now

how cold she had been. She closed her eyes and then jerked them open.

If she had her flute, she could play a little, to stay awake. She started to hum. "You see?" someone demanded, in what was apparently meant for a whisper, "she's so happy to be in the saddle again after a long walk that she's singing."

"And such a lovely voice, too, your majesty," someone whispered back.

Polijn stopped humming. She would recite the songs to herself. If only the rhythm of them didn't act as a lullaby. Maybe if she recited them to herself in the order she'd learned them: the concentration required to remember the proper chronology might keep her alert.

She got through four, but the fifth seemed a little muddled in her memory. The line "The ratbirds twittered, snickered loud" didn't sound right. For one thing, the tale of Furbee had no ratbirds in it. She knew it didn't. But did Zitina know it? And who was Zitina? Polijn blinked. Why was she worrying about Zitina, anyhow? She didn't know anybody named Zitina. But there were still the ratbirds to be considered. Did she know any songs about ratbirds?

What she did know, as soon as the cry of triumph broke in on her, was that she had nodded off and, in passing the test, had

failed. Her goose was now spit-
ted and hung over the fire to
brown. She had slumped against
the back of the saddle and,
swathed in quilts, had an-
chored there.

"Hail to the Princess Zitina!"
the court cried, in response to
the queen's calls. Polijn saw
Prince Donnyl slouching in the
back of the crowd, muttering to
himself.

"There!" said her majesty,
reaching up to lift Polijn down.
"I told you! Didn't I tell you?
And you may witness her
equestrian skills when daylight
is full!"

Polijn couldn't resist as she
was pulled in for a huge hug.
She didn't even want to pull
away. Every bone in her body
ached, and next she would have
to demonstrate her skill with a
horse.

Polijn had never actually been
astride a horse, barring fat eld-
erly Jansere, who had pulled a
garbage cart. She was, butter
and bone, a city girl, and a city
girl, moreover, whose family
had no money or time for ani-
mals not destined for the pot.

So she was briefly enheart-
ened when, after a thanksgiv-
ing service in the chapel and a
bountiful breakfast, the weather
proved to be even more dismal
than it had been the day before.
The queen was at a loss for only
a moment, however.

"Oh, it will clear off by this
afternoon!" she declared. "Now,
child, we must away to the
wardrobe. We can try all the
wedding clothes, and I'm not at
all sure the jewels I picked out
will suit you. The louts told me
your hair was much lighter
than that. You must give me
your opinion." She whirled
away, drawing Polijn painfully
along behind.

Polijn had had hopes that the
queen would tire of her com-
pany, giving her a little time to
talk to someone, the king, or,
at worst, the prince, about her
predicament. Convincing the
queen at this point would be im-
possible. Even talking to her
was unlikely. But the bustling
monarch never left her side,
dropping heavy dresses onto
her, rearranging this, moving
that, asking her opinion but
never waiting for it. Polijn
ground her teeth. The longer
this went on, the more likely
was a horrible ending. Partic-
ularly if the real Princess Zi-
tina didn't turn up until after
the wedding.

To make matters worse, the
queen had ordered a bit of mu-
sic to keep them all cheerful
during the ordeal of sorting
clothes. The harp had a broken
string and had obviously been
sitting in the damp for quite
some time. Polijn was on the
verge of storming over and tun-

ing the thing by force when a pounding at the door startled them all.

"No, they can't come in!" the queen ordered. "This is complicated work: complicated work and they aren't to come in and disarrange things! Oh!"

The door had been thrown open despite her, and a small crowd of courtiers burst into the room, led by a woman clad in sopping brown and orange garments. She threw off her great-coat and Polijn noticed the huge Z on the front. The coat hadn't kept much rain off; her gown was plastered around her legs. There was no difficulty deducing that this woman had been on a horse all her life.

"Cheese and crackers!" the queen exclaimed. "What is this?"

Two men stepped aside to let Prince Donnyl through (and, Polijn observed, to give him a little push forward). "Mamma," he said, "this is Zitina. The princess."

"Nonsense!" the queen exclaimed, looking from Polijn to the newcomer.

The princess dashed a pint of water from long eyelashes. She was a robust, hearty creature with big black eyes and reddish-gold hair that was probably rife with ring-curls when it was properly dried and set. She struck a stance and put a hand to the side of her face.

"I outrode them all!" she announced. "And then my cowardly retinue turned back when they saw that the bridge was out!"

"I have no doubt," snapped the queen. "Naturally, a real princess would of course desert her followers and arrive without a retinue: without a retinue! Oh, yes."

Polijn was a little surprised, but even more surprised to see that nobody else in the room looked surprised. In fact, from all the head-nodding going on, it seemed that everyone was siding with the queen.

The princess raised her chin. "Then, madam," she went on, "realizing that your wretched roads had been turned to mud, I left my horse at a farm along the route and walked the rest of the way. Now take me at once to your sovereigns."

"To move about on foot!" exclaimed the queen, with scorn. "As though she had no horse at all! Who let this creature come in here?"

Again Polijn looked around for someone to object. But only the princess stood forth, planting dimpled fists on what were undoubtedly dimpled hips. One lock of hair flopped down over one eye. She tossed her head back to shake it away.

"I do not know who you may be, madam . . ." she began.

Queen Thythian drew herself up to her full height, which still left her a head shorter than Zitina. "We are," she announced, with slow, ponderous dignity; "Her Majesty Thythian, Queen and Consort of His Majesty King Homuard II" She raised her nose in a manner not only regal but imperial. Then she added, "And you are a hussy and an impostor!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Zitina, turning red. "I am . . ." She turned to the courtiers behind her. "I asked to be taken to your queen! Will you let me be insulted by some housekeeper?"

Polijn had sort of cherished a notion that people of royal blood could instinctively recognize each other. Prince Donnyl, looking worried, was leaning forward to explain when Zitina came around to face the queen again and caught sight of a woman in wedding finery.

"And who is this?" she demanded, stabbing a finger toward Polijn.

Murmurs had been buzzing around the room, but now everyone's lips clamped shut. The queen took two steps forward. "This," she stated, in ringing tones, "is Zitina. The princess."

Zitina turned even redder. She said not a word but reached down to shove some gold bracelets a little farther up her arm before starting for Polijn.

Prince Donnyl reached out to stop her. "Unhand me!" she ordered, vibrating with fury.

Someone farther back in the crowd pulled at Prince Donnyl, who turned and gave him a fierce shove. Two of the victim's friends pushed back at him, jostling him into the back of the princess, who jabbed him with her elbow.

"Here now!" called the queen. "Stop this! Oh! Stop this at once! We shall investigate the matter and the impostor shall be hanged in chains at the gate: hanged in chains!"

She was glaring at Zitina, but it was Polijn who grew thoughtful. Once the truth came out, the queen would never let her off that easily. Hanging in chains would be too nice for her.

Meanwhile, the princess had seized her chance to move in on Polijn, who was pulling back as best she could, encumbered by embroidered gowns and undergowns and slips and buckled shoes. Before Zitina could wreak any slaughter, however, someone in the crowd called, "His majesty!"

Everyone in the room turned toward the door, where Homuard I stood. Zitina cried out, "His majesty!" and ran across the floor to meet him.

"There!" she said, reaching the king. "Your majesty, please tell this . . . this horseless being who I am and take me to

meet your true queen."

By the time the king could open his mouth, though, the room had erupted into utter madness. "Horseless being" was an insult not to be swallowed, and Thythian's closest companions were not very happy about "true queen," either. There were those, however, who had never thought Polijn looked very princessy, and were anxious to see that Zitina got her proper respect, as well. Shouting was very quickly augmented by pushing and pinching. A little name-calling revealed a number of unresolved side issues, from border disputes between Laramis and Spayle to who had winked at whose daughter at the thanksgiving breakfast.

Prince Donnyl quickly pulled himself to a safe position on a table, where he tried to act as arbitrator, yelling, "Don't you shout at her majesty!" and then screaming at her himself. Zitina had lost all restraint and was lashing out with a lethal pink fist, to the distress of the wardrobe mistress, who saw bloody noses being wiped on cloth-of-gold slips.

Polijn could do very little but duck, and wasn't even very good at that, penned in by multiple layers of cloth as she was. What she wanted was a little peace so she could think. Obviously, perhaps inevitably, the bulk of the crowd would side

with the real princess. But the more they shouted and contradicted the queen, the more entrenched her majesty became. Given a lull in the action, she would move to marry Prince Donnyl off to her princess, no matter who the creature was. This was turning into a matter of principle, and facts were irrelevant.

Somebody was shouting something about a trial by combat. Polijn could not afford to let that idea spread; Zitina was half a foot taller than she was and outweighed her by plenty.

She had strong lungs—such were essential for the kind of minstrelsy she practiced—and a bit of experience in shouting down crowds, if she knew what to shout. "Wait!" she bellowed. "Halt!"

She saw surprise and just a touch of respect in the eyes of the queen, who was no mean shouter. "Stop at once!" the queen called. "The Princess Zitina has something to say!"

The crowd was reluctant to stop, and calling Polijn a princess again nearly set off new waves of violence. "I . . ." Zitina began.

"Silence!" Polijn ordered. There was so much authority behind the word that Zitina took three steps back.

Slowly the crowd pulled itself into an audience. Polijn raised a hand to Prince Donnyl, who

obediently hauled her up to the top of his table. Something with drama in it, Polijn thought, looking around the crowd. It was a court that had undoubtedly witnessed some excellent drama from its queen, and it would settle for nothing less. Polijn needed something with drama and a touch of magic to bring the royal couple together so they could live happily ever after. (She meant the princess and the queen, of course; there was no hope at all for Prince Donnyl once those two started working with each other.)

"It is true!" she announced putting one hand to her cheek and hurling the other out at arm's length toward Zitina. "That is, indeed, the form and face of Princess Zitina!"

The crowd stared at her and then turned to the queen. "She's overwrought," said that monarch. "Overtired; that's what it is. She doesn't know what she's saying."

The king bent to whisper something to her, but she pushed him away, snorting, "Non-sense! Your eyes are dimmed with age."

"Listen to me, oh, well-horsed people of Spayle!" Polijn cried. She sort of missed having a tambourine to rattle, but supposed it was a bad habit to rely on props. "Zitina, the Princess of Laramis, did indeed set out for Spayle, despite torrents of

rain, for she was eager to meet her future parents, and her loving spouse!"

She pressed Donnyl's hand. He jerked it away so fast he nearly tumbled from the table.

"So noble was her horse, so fierce her desire," Polijn announced, "that she soon out-distanced her retinue. And, in the course of time, she saw ahead of her the bridge over the river." She wished she had taken time to find out the name of the river.

"That bridge is washed out!" someone called, hooting.

"Ah!" cried Polijn, pointing a finger toward the sound as though it exactly proved her point. "And when did it wash out? Did you see it?"

"Yesterday! In the afternoon!"

"Nah! Closer to midday!"

"But did you see it?" Polijn demanded.

"Who could see it?" the queen replied. "The wind was so fierce; everyone stayed inside."

"Excellent," said Polijn. And it was, too.

"Just before midday," she went on, "that was when I reached the bridge. But we had noticed the wind before, when we set off in the morning. I was dressed then as you see me now." She pointed at Zitina, who frowned, but couldn't come up with any reply.

"Then the rain began. We

moved on, through the howling wind." Polijn took a couple of steps across the table to demonstrate the procession's progress. "Until my turkey-hearted retainers refused to go farther. I rode on alone, anxious to see my beloved new family. I knew all along that I must certainly love those whom I had heard so much of, and I missed them though I had never seen them." Best to lay it on thick, she felt. They were used to lots of flavor in Spayle.

"I know now I should have waited. My horse knew better than I, as is not unusual." The crowd seemed to nod in unison; everyone knew horses had a deep sense surpassing that of humans. "He refused to go on with his legs caked in mud, so I left him at the first dry farmhouse, knowing that everyone in Spayle could competently care for such a fine animal. I went on afoot, through the mud, with lightning slashing the sky above me."

She bent forward and her voice intensified. "Rain and sleet were biting into my face as I reached the bridge. I had set my feet on the first wet plank when a flash tore the sky open and revealed, at the far end of the bridge, the ill-featured form of a witch!"

A few of the more susceptible members of the crowd shrieked, but that was the only sound as

Polijn straightened and took a step back. Even Donnyl and Zitina seemed fascinated.

"Her slack black locks dripped with the wet," Polijn told them. "Eyes like hellfire burned in a pale, cold face, and I could see those ears of ill omen." (Polijn had stored up every remark anyone had ever made about her pointed ears and intended to turn every single one of them to profit somehow. Now she shook her hair back a little to display the ears in question.) "For a moment I wondered if she were real. The sleet seemed to be blowing through her, and the seething black cat at her side, as well."

Polijn put a hand to her waist, as if drawing a knife. "I knew she meant me no good, so I braced myself for a fight. But the witch threw her hands into the air and screamed into the wind."

She suited her own actions to the narration, and the crowd fell back. "The world grew even darker. Blue lights spun before my eyes, then orange ones, and then blue again. When my eyes cleared, I stood on the other end of the bridge, staring at myself. The witch had changed our bodies, that she might come to Spayle and ensnare your beloved prince!"

Donnyl gasped. "She wouldn't dare!" cried Zitina, caught up in the story.

Polijn raised one hand. "But she had made a foolish error. In changing to my body, she was now at the wrong end of the bridge. She had to approach me to cross, and, as she moved, her own cat, who did not now recognize her, leaped for her throat. She screamed, and fell away."

Both hands were up now. "I should have run to the castle then, but my thought was for revenge, and the return of the body that had been stolen from me. The witch was still screaming, and I did not know it was another vile spell. The wind, wicked enough before, now doubled its force. The bridge could not stand against it and crumbled around us. In moments, we, all of us, cat, princess, witch, were at the mercy of the rain-flooded river."

Polijn shrugged, and dropped her hands. "I am no swimmer; I am a horsewoman. I would no doubt have been lost, but the river water knew the clothes I wore were cursed by the witch's ownership, and spat me out on the shore. I had not been taken too far out of the road, and was able to come to the castle. The rest you know, from the warm and royal welcome I received to this moment."

A few people applauded. Some cheered. Donnyl asked, "What happened to the cat?"

But the queen pushed up to the table and demanded, "Why

did you not mention this before?"

Polijn grew sad. "What good would it have done, your majesty? I was certain the witch had been drowned and I would be doomed to wear this tight, skinny body forever." Her mouth drew up, exposing white teeth. "But now she has returned, and we can break the spell."

The crowd had drawn away from Zitina, who suddenly realized what this all meant for her. "It's all lies!" she shouted.

"Oh!" cried the queen, turning. "And that's what you would say, you monster!" Donnyl knelt on the table to whisper.

"Yes!" her majesty went on. "You men! See that the witch can't speak any spells!"

It took ten men and six women to hold Zitina still long enough to force the gag into her mouth, and she kept kicking for a long time after it would have done her any good. Once the queen was sure the witch was under control, she turned back to Polijn.

"Do you know how to break the spell, dear one?" she asked.

Polijn had been running through her memory for all the scraps of magic she had witnessed. Something pretty stark and basic was wanted here; these were not the people to appreciate delicately measured potions and rare metals.

"I think so, your majesty,"

she said. "Does your majesty's castle have a smithy by the river?"

"You know we do, child," she said. "Everyone does. Ours is not all that far from the bridge. To be sure, you must have been washed past it."

Polijn nodded. "Lock me up there with the witch until midnight, chained by our wrists across the anvil. You know well that such an instrument as an anvil can't abide evil beings. If we prepare properly, it will force her spirit back into her own body. Once I am safe in my own form, you may deal with the witch as you will."

The queen nodded sagely, and complete agreement was written on every face except the red one of Zitina. "But how can we be sure you've switched back?" Prince Donn timer demanded. "The witch will say she's you, no matter what happens."

Sitting down on the edge of the table, Polijn beckoned. The queen and her son moved in. "You will know which is the true princess," said Polijn. "By this password." She leaned forward still farther, and whispered.

With a hug, the queen lifted her daughter-in-law-to-be from the table as the crowd roared approval. "Now!" said her majesty, releasing the princess. "What preparations must we make, dearest?"

Polijn tried to catch her breath again. "Two . . . two wax candles," she said, running through her memory again. "A broom. Not a new one, of course. A bit of silver. A white rose—a dried one will do—and three parsnips."

The queen's face fell. "We have no parsnips," she said. "The loobies used the last of them a week ago."

"Oh, did I say parsnips?" said Polijn. "I meant turnips." She paused, but no one objected. "And put a drop of wax on the tip of each."

She had to suffer through another hug. "Oh!" exclaimed the queen. "To have a daughter-in-law with so many talents!"

Then she gave orders, and soon Polijn found herself inhaling the heady odors of the smithy. Two servants brought her her own clothes, at arm's length. She donned them with as much distaste as possible, while at the same time taking inventory. No one had seen fit to steal anything a witch had touched.

Another servant locked iron cuffs onto the two princesses. He trembled as he did so, knowing that one wrist belonged to a princess and the other to a witch. Zitina had been unbound and ungagged once they were inside the smithy, since everyone knew this was neutral ground. Polijn noticed the red-

faced princess easing around the anvil toward her, and eased in the opposite direction.

"Here, my love," said the queen, coming up to Polijn. "A bit of silver." She personally pinned a shiny brooch onto Polijn's tunic. "Everything else is here, dear one," she went on, pointing to the pile of artifacts on the anvil. She smothered Polijn in one more hug.

"Don't touch the witch, Mother," Donnnyl whispered.

"She's not the witch yet," the queen told him. "Oh! Will it work?"

"I have faith, your majesty," Polijn told her, trying to keep her eyes off the seething princess. "Now everyone had better leave us. You cannot know how the anvil will react, and it might be dangerous for you. And someone must watch to see that my retinue does not cross the river. They might not understand, if they saw us chained here."

"You are so clever!" cried the queen. "You heard her highness, you louts! Be off!"

The court filed out. The door of the smithy slammed shut. And Princess Zitina reached under her dress.

Polijn had slender, malleable hands. As soon as the door had started to close, one of these had dropped to the cuff around the wrist of the other. She pulled free of the cuff as the princess's

knife slashed past her.

"That will make it easier," snarled the princess, coming around the anvil. "You will work no spells on me, witch."

Polijn was neither a horse-woman nor a warrior maiden, but she was street-bred and knew how this worked. There were plenty of weapons on hand in the smithy, and she was not hampered by a wet, clinging gown.

"Witch!" shouted Zitina as Polijn was sitting astride her back. "When my father's men get here . . ."

"They will not find me," Polijn told her. She studied the jeweled hilt of the princess's knife and then stuck it under her belt. "You should have been here a day sooner."

Zitina tried to wrestle free. She was well-muscled, and Polijn had to bang her head against the floor a bit before she would listen. "Say," Polijn told her, holding a small hammer where she could see it, "sit still. I don't want to break anything you might need for riding."

The princess kicked, but couldn't reach anything vital from her position. "What do you want, anyway?" she demanded, her mouth against the floor. "What have I done to you, witch?"

"I'm not a witch," Polijn informed her. "I'm a minstrel. All I wanted was to earn my supper

and a bed for the night. But the queen was expecting you and insisted that I was the Princess Zitina. She was anxious to meet you, of course, or she wouldn't have made such a mistake."

Zitina bucked, and Polijn gave her a little thump in the middle of the back. "It's a stupid mistake!" Zitina roared.

"Yes, it is," said Polijn, kicking at an arm as the princess tried to rise to all fours. "But you've met her now. How much chance will there be for you here if you show her, in front of the whole court, that she made a stupid mistake?"

The princess tried to roll over, but stopped as she thought about that. Polijn waited, hoping she'd see reason. This plan wouldn't work at all if an unruly princess had to be held down all night.

"All right," growled Zitina. "I can see what you mean. So, what? When they come back, do you want me to say we've changed bodies again and you're the witch?"

"Not exactly," Polijn told her. Rising, she told her a bit more.

Driven by curiosity, the queen led the court to the smithy nearly an hour before the midnight deadline. They found the Princess Zitina alone, leaning against the anvil. Iron cuffs hung from one wrist.

She leaped up on seeing them, and ran to hug the queen. "Oh, your majesty! It is so marvelous

to be one's self again! Pony pony pony!"

Her majesty was a little bewildered, but returned the hug. Pony was, after all, the password. "Is it really your highness, then?"

"It is!" cried the redhaired princess, turning to take Prince Donnyl's hand. "And at last I can join in the celebration. You noticed before, of course, how I hesitated?"

"Well, yes," the queen said, thinking back. "Oh, yes! But I thought it was just your own becoming shyness."

Her majesty found herself being hugged again. "It was so hard to be joyful when I wasn't really me. But at last I can greet you as myself. Your majesty!"

Again the queen returned the hug, a little more confidently this time. But her eyes went around the room, looking for the more waiflike form of the previous princess. "And what has become of the witch?"

Zitina pulled back from her, eyes growing round. "Vanished, your majesty, borne away by demons in a burst of flame! They tore the clothes from her very back as they flew, to prepare her for the torment that would be her reward for failure."

The court moved in for another stirring tale. "Were you hurt?" the queen demanded,

pointing to bruises on her arms. "Oh! You were hurt!"

"Oh, just a little," Zitina assured her. "There was one especially ugly little demon who pounced on me. She is gone now, too."

"The demons were women?" demanded the queen.

"Some of them," the princess said. "But let us go up to your majesty's sitting room where I can give you all the details."

The meeting was adjourned and reconvened as quickly as possible in the castle, where Zitina did indeed spin out all the details of the mystic evening. Polijn had given her only a bare outline to work from, depending on what she had seen of the princess's flair for drama to provide the rest. She would not have been disappointed.

In the meantime, Polijn herself was moving nearer to the border of Spayle. She wasn't taking the shortest route; the princess's men might see her there, and mention her when they reached the castle, and besides, the bridge was out. Her stay at the castle had done her

no particular harm. She now had the silver brooch and the princess's jeweled knife, which she could sell as soon as she got somewhere beyond the reach of anyone who might recognize them. If she really needed money before then, the three turnips could be sold for a penny, perhaps. She could even make a quick breakfast out of them come morning, though she preferred parsnips, really.

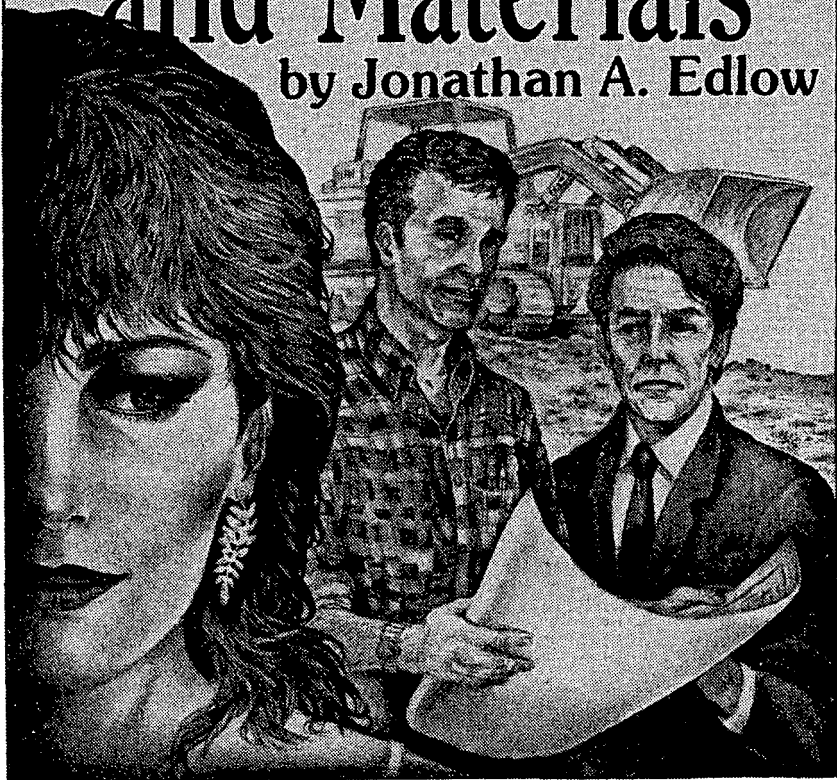
But she had something that would be worth more than the turnips or the brooch, and she was taking it to the kingdom of Laramis. The king would certainly pay more than a penny when he heard the thrilling tale of how his daughter, the Princess Zitina, battled the witch on the bridge, and later defeated the evil woman across the mighty anvil.

Polijn whistled as she went, trying to decide what tune would fit the song best. Should she add something at the end about the grand wedding to Prince Donnyl? She shook her head. Much better, really, to end with the defeat of the witch. Why spoil a happy ending?

FICTION

Time and Materials

by Jonathan A. Edlow



Now that I drive a Mercedes and own Bertha outright, people think I'm a lot smarter than I was when I drove the old Ford pickup and had to rent. But if

they knew how I earned that German roadster, I don't know what they'd think. I'm still not sure what to think myself.

Some time back, my contracting business was foundering. I

Illustration by Dell Harris

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had started hunting for a desk job with all the trimmings when I received that unforgettable phone call from Mr. Simon Alexander. I remember the date, April 14th, because I was at my desk nursing a beer and computing last year's taxes. Trying to revive a set of ledgers consisting of a few lonely credits drowning in a sea of debits is no easy task, and I was almost out of beer. I remember the time because it was ten thirty. Normally, I let my answering machine click on after ten, but I never ignore a diversion from tax preparation, so I picked up.

"Mr. Maxwell," the voice said, in a proper British accent, "I apologize for the hour; I do hope I'm not catching you at an inopportune time. My name is Simon Alexander, and if I may, I'd like to discuss your building an add-on to my home."

With that opener, and my cash flow, no time would have been inopportune. "I'm a late owl, Mr. Alexander," I said. "I was just planning my summer schedule; now is a perfect time to talk."

"Splendid."

"How did you get my name?" I asked.

"Someone my wife's bridge partner knows; I forget her name. She recommended you highly."

"Great. What can you tell me about the project?"

"I'm an architect, Mr. Maxwell, and I've designed a wine cellar to be excavated adjacent to my present living room. A large spiral stair will ascend from the cellar into a ground-level glass atrium which will connect to the living room by a panel of french doors," he said. "I think you'll find the project challenging and exciting."

"I already do, Mr. Alexander—"

"Do call me Simon."

"Okay, and I'm Sam. I can swing by tomorrow to study the site, pick up a copy of the plans, and give you my bid by middle of next week."

"Oh, there's no need of that, Sam. Unfortunately, my schedule is extraordinarily tight; my wife and I are keen on beginning as soon as possible. I'm prepared to hire you tonight. And to allay any fears about cost overruns, I propose to pay you on the basis of time and materials, provided you can start tomorrow?"

I still had two boxes of papers to sort through, and I had an appointment with my accountant in the morning. But I could always file for an extension. Besides, I needed the money. We discussed terms, and he was paying top dollar. "Mr. Simon Alexander," I said, "you've got yourself a contractor. I'll see you in the morning."

He gave me directions, then

rang off. In retrospect, the whole business smelled queer from the start. I mean, having an architect call a relatively unknown contractor, late at night, closing a deal like that over the phone, and getting paid time and materials. But like I say, I needed the cash, and elation cuts through suspicion faster than a table saw slices through a two by four. Besides, I do good work; my clients are happy at the end of a job. And Mr. Alexander's story wasn't so bizarre. Clients will do strange things when they need something done yesterday, so I dumped my taxes back into their cardboard tomb and tried to sleep.

The next day, I fired up the Ford and drove to Alexander's fashionable suburban home. Simon was a few inches shorter than my six foot frame, and much slimmer. He was pale, with a thick head of dark hair, generously peppered with gray. I guessed him to be in his late forties, maybe fifty.

"Welcome, Sam. Delighted to meet you. May I get you some coffee or tea? Perhaps a fresh pastry?"

I declined with a backhanded wave of my hand. "Thanks. But you're a man who gets right down to business, and so am I. Let's walk through the project with a set of plans in hand."

"Excellent, old sport." He slapped me hard on the back, then produced the plans from a locked desk drawer. "I like a man who dispenses with the preliminaries. Let's get to work straightaway," he said.

We walked through his living room. The far wall encompassed a large stone fireplace which Mr. Alexander pointed to. "That wall will be demolished, save for the hearth. On either side of the hearth, french doors will open up into the new space." He pointed at the set of plans. "As you can see from the elevations, the perimeter walls are all of three by six panels of double-glazed glass butted together with silicone joints."

"And the spiral staircase winds around this concrete column here," I said, taking the drawings into my hands. "And descends into the wine cellar."

"Exactly."

"Looks fairly straightforward. I'll need to check the electric and plumbing hookups in the basement, but I don't foresee any difficulties." I was scrutinizing the plans as I spoke. "You're calling for a twelve-inch thick slab?"

"Oh, I know, it's overly generous, but I'm an old-school architect. My wife teases me about it, but I like a safe, sturdy foundation."

I thumbed through a few pages. "And the column. Is it

really necessary? The stairs can spiral around themselves. There's no need of a twenty inch concrete sonotube there," I said, looking up at him.

"No need structurally, perhaps. However, aesthetically there's a great need. The concept simply wouldn't work without the stairs' being strung out at a slower pace." He made a grand, sweeping gesture with both arms. It was a gesture I had often seen architects make, a gesture that usually costs an owner several thousand dollars, a gesture that ignites heated discussions between architect, builder, and owner. If I were bidding on the job, I'd have insisted the staircase and column be a separate line item with an allowance, but since I was being paid time and materials, I kept my mouth shut.

He handed me a copy of the drawings and of the building permit, which he had already obtained.

"See you tomorrow," said Mr. Alexander as he opened the door for me and handed me a check for twenty thousand dollars. "Here's the first installment. I'm looking forward to starting."

"My crew and I'll be here bright and early, ready for excavation," I said, pocketing the check.

As I turned to go, a woman sauntered up the brick path to-

wards us. She wore a sleek white silk dress which contrasted admirably with her rich suntan and highlighted her green eyes. Her red hair danced on her shoulders as she walked. She said hello to Simon, but her eyes never left mine. Simon kissed her cheek and said, "Sam Maxwell, I'd like you to meet my wife Erica. Darling, Sam is the contractor; he'll be starting in the morning."

"Pleased to meet you, Sam. I know you're going to work out just fine." She squeezed my hand, and right away, I knew I was in trouble.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," I said, trying to extricate my hand as gracefully as possible.

"If you're going to be working here day after day, I hope you'll call me Erica."

I smiled and said I would.

"I see my husband hasn't been a very good host, Sam. Can I offer you something to drink, some breakfast maybe?"

"Actually, your husband already has, but I've got a busy day ahead," I said, rattling the set of plans with my free hand.

"Erica, darling, let the man go."

She released my hand, shot her husband a venomous glance, turned to me with a smile, and said it was a pleasure to meet me. My legs turned to wet cement for a moment; then I muttered some pleasantries and left.

The next morning, I returned with Eddy and Bill and a bulldozer named Bertha. Eddy, my right-hand man, had forgotten more about carpentry than I had ever learned. Bill, on the other hand, was denser than a diamond drill bit. But he was trustworthy, and neither Eddy nor I had the heart to fire him. After we offloaded Bertha, Eddy and Bill went to the lumberyard for stock. I began digging a hole twenty by twenty by ten feet deep. Demolition is dirty, dusty work, and Bertha was really kicking it up that day. It was record hot; the air was dead, and the dust was sticking to me. Before too long, Erica strolled over with a tall glass.

She was wearing a white sundress with pale blue stripes that curved where she did. I was still mounted atop Bertha, so Erica stood several feet below me. The sun shone over my shoulder and into her squinting emerald eyes. She shaded the sun with her right hand in a salute at her forehead and said, "It's frightfully hot for mid-April, Sam. I thought you might need a cool lemonade." She stretched up to me holding a glass that was sweating as much as I was. Her fingers brushed against mine longer than they needed to.

"Thanks, Mrs. Alexander."

"I told you, it's Erica."

"Thanks, Erica."

She turned to look at the hole I was digging. "I cannot fathom why he's building a wine cellar. Neither of us is much of a connoisseur."

"It'll be a beautiful room, no matter what you use it for," I said.

"I'm certain it will. Ever since I first saw Simon's drawings when I was a student, I've loved his designs."

"You're an architect, too?"

"Almost. Simon was my teacher. I never finished school, but I completed five semesters of courses, and I still help Simon with his designs."

"Why didn't you finish?"

She grimaced for an instant, then smiled. "Simon thought it looked bad for him to be sleeping with one of his students. He offered to marry me, and convinced me to be his housewife instead of his colleague."

"It sounds like you've never forgiven him."

Just then Simon walked over, kissed Erica, and said to me, "Bright and early, just as you promised. Any questions about where to dig?"

"No. I checked with the utilities yesterday—no problems there. And the plans are quite excellent."

"Will you pour any of the concrete this week?" he asked.

"No; I'll start pouring Monday morning." It was only Wednesday, but I still had a lot

of excavating to do and dirt to dump, and I'd need the building inspector's stamp. One way to get an inspector really pissed off is to pour concrete before he says it's okay. I'd made that mistake before and had to remove the pad. Believe me, that's a mistake you only make once.

"If you get the city's stamp by Friday, do you mind if I begin pouring the pad myself over the weekend?" asked Simon.

I wasn't wild about the idea and I knew Eddy would like it even less, but I didn't see any real harm. "Why the hell would you want to do a job like that?"

"You don't sit at a desk all day, Sam. There's a bit of frustrated contractor in all of us architects."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Sometimes I'll spend a weekend drawing out plans."

"Besides, my wife keeps telling me I need the exercise." Simon patted his belly. "I suppose she's right about that."

"Well, dear," said Erica, "if we don't leave this man to do his work, there'll be no hole to fill with concrete or anything else." They gave one another the looks that married people do sometimes and departed in separate directions.

Each day that first week, Erica visited the job site. To see the progress. To bring us coffee. To bring

us lemonade. To do some gardening. Or just to watch us work. I didn't realize how obvious her flirting with me was until Bill started ribbing me about it. Bill sometimes didn't notice when we finished one job and started the next.

I didn't encourage Erica's visits, but I didn't discourage them either.

On Monday I arrived to find a completed concrete pad and Simon Alexander standing proudly by its side.

"What do you think?" he asked, arms spread-eagled.

"More important is what Eddy thinks," I said. Eddy eyeballed it from several different angles, then attacked the pad with a level, examining it at regular intervals. If it was a hair off, Eddy wouldn't build a dog house on top of it. "You've got promise, Mr. Alexander," Eddy said. "It's as level as a Kansas cornfield. You even remembered to set the anchor bolts."

We pulled the forms, then started bolting on the sill plates that morning and nailing the framing that afternoon. Around two P.M., Bill playfully tapped my shoulder with his hammer and asked, "Where's your girlfriend?"

I ignored Bill's jibe and kept pounding home nails, and twice, my thumb. The next day Erica still hadn't made an appearance. Simon inspected our prog-

ress several times that day. On Wednesday I said to him, "Don't tell me your wife isn't interested in seeing the framing go up; it's the most exciting part of the job."

"Oh, yes, Erica. She's off somewhere or another."

"You don't know where your wife is?" I asked, before I could edit the thought.

"Sam, that's none of your business."

"I apologize. It just struck me as odd. I mean you can—Never mind."

"Let's just forget it," Simon said, and I agreed.

But I couldn't forget it, just as I couldn't forget that the slab of concrete was six inches thicker than code required. Just as I thought it was strange that a man would elect to pour six tons of concrete for fun. I didn't sleep that night.

The next morning, while parked at the doughnut shop, I launched a test balloon. "Eddy, do you think it's odd that Simon's wife hasn't been around this week?"

He dunked his chocolate-frosted doughnut into his coffee. "Nope."

"I'm worried about her."

He bit off the soggy end. "Why?"

"I think Simon may have killed her and buried her in the slab."

He dunked again, bit again, and I most certainly know that

closed his eyes, swished some coffee around in his mouth as he did when he was computing a complex mitre-cut, and said, "Two air compressors, couple of hydraulic jack hammers, we could find out in less than a day."

"What do you think?" I asked.

Eddy crumpled his Styrofoam cup and put it in the empty doughnut bag. "I think you're crazy."

"Officer, I am reporting a possible murder, and I suggest you take it seriously."

He groaned, clicked on his ballpoint pen, slapped a form on the desk, and, without looking up, asked, "Name of victim?"

Forty minutes later we all stood at the edge of the slab: me, Eddy, Bill, Simon, two uniformed patrolmen, and a detective named Barnes. He asked me for the third time, "Are you sure you want to go ahead with this?"

"Yes," I said.

"And you, Mr. Alexander, are you sure you don't know the whereabouts of your wife?"

A vein popped out vertically down the center of his forehead, and he turned an unflattering shade of purple. "I'm afraid we have an unconventional relationship, detective. I don't know where she is. But I *do* know that she's simply on holiday, and I most certainly know that

she's not dead." The vein bulged forward.

Barnes nodded and the jack hammers erupted in a cacophony of painful sound. I tried to say something to Simon, but he couldn't hear me over the din. After three excruciating hours, the pad had been perforated at least thirty times, and no blood seeped up from the fenestrations.

Barnes apologized to Simon, and Eddy and Bill made themselves scarce. I walked over to Simon. "I'm sorry. I just felt so—"

"Sam, I've nothing to say to you right now. Ring me in the morning." He marched off without waiting for a response.

At eight the next morning my phone rang. I was expecting Eddy to call to see if we were still in business, but it was Erica. "I'm quite flattered," she said.

"Erica, thank God you're all right!"

"Of course I'm all right. Why on earth would you have thought otherwise?"

"Never mind. Are you at home?"

"Yes."

"How's Simon?"

"He's right here; he wants to speak to you."

I gritted my teeth and looked at the ceiling, hoping for an earthquake or a plane crash.

Simon's voice came over the line. "I hope that satisfies you, Sam. Obviously Erica is quite alive. Now about our business—"

"Simon, if you want to fire me, I understand. I deserve it."

"You're damned right you deserve it. However, I am a practical man, and I am still operating under my original time constraints. I have neither the time nor the inclination to find a new contractor at this point. I want you to stay on. Of course, I will not pay you for yesterday's work or for the time you spend rebuilding the pad."

"Of course not." After all, you couldn't expect a man to pay time and materials for work that might have led to his own conviction. I think that's a corollary to the Fifth Amendment.

We spent most of the day clearing away the debris of the violated pad. Eddy and Bill were on the ground loading chunks of concrete into Bertha's hungry scoop, and I sat atop her transferring each load into the truck.

The weather had continued to be unseasonably warm, and a gusty breeze was kicking up from the southwest. Erica had been sunbathing in the back yard clad only in a skimpy bikini. Eddy and Bill couldn't see

from my vantage point, I could. Finally she approached the work site, covered from neck to ankle by a yellow cotton robe with flowers embroidered on it.

She marched over to me, put her hand on my knee, and said, "Thanks for caring." Then she walked back into the house. Bill, carrying a wheelbarrow full of concrete, whistled under his breath and shook his head. We were ready to re-pour the foundation by about five in the afternoon, but because of the time and the anticipated good weather, we left all the equipment ready for an early morning start.

We returned the next morning to find an exhausted Simon troweling some concrete around one of the bolt anchors. My heart plunged into my steel-tipped work boots. A jelly doughnut and a cup of black coffee churned around in my gut like sand and water in a cement mixer.

Astonished, I asked, "What have you done?"

He stood and turned towards us, looking up at us from the depth of the hole. "Exactly what it looks like. I'm sure Eddy will find it acceptable. You need the pad, and as my wife continually reminds me, I need the exercise. Surely you haven't any objection?"

I stood there speechless.

"I'll check it out when it's dry," said Eddy.

"And I shall go have a well-deserved shower and rest," said Simon.

Bill whistled and shook his head.

After Simon left, Eddy looked at me and rolled himself a cigarette. "What I want to know," he said, "is this: If the missus is off on another vacation without an itinerary, what are you going to do? Because I have no intention of laying down sill plates just to rip 'em up again."

"I'm going to see if she's home," I said.

I could hear Bill whistle, and though he was behind me, I could see him shaking his head.

I reached for the doorbell, but before I could press it, the door swung open. I entered to see Simon Alexander glaring at me. "Is there anything wrong?" he asked.

"Where's Erica?"

"I say, you've taken quite an interest in my wife, haven't you? In case the jack hammers have affected your brain, the operative phrase here is 'my wife.'"

"Where is she?"

His glare melted into a smile. "I say, you *are* a chap that dispenses with the preliminaries. Well, so shall I. Erica is off on another one of her holidays. I don't know where, and frankly, I don't care. Now I'm really

quite exhausted so if you'll excuse me." He pivoted and made for the stairs.

I grabbed his shoulder and swung him back towards me. "I want to see her now or your brand new foundation won't even have a chance to dry."

"Sam," he said, jerking himself free, "examine the situation. Forget that Erica is my wife. Her whereabouts are none of your business. If she wanted you to know, she'd have told you. You're not the first man she's had this effect on, and probably not the last. But grab ahold of yourself. And before you commit any impulsive acts, I suggest you consult with your crew so that cooler heads may prevail. Good day."

He marched up the stairs, and I stood in the coolness of the foyer thinking only about how sorely I missed Erica.

I joined up with Eddy and Bill, who were leaning up against Bertha sipping coffee from white Styrofoam cups. "What's it gonna be?" asked Eddy.

I remembered the way she squeezed my hand when we first met, the way she brushed her wet fingers against me when she gave me the lemonade, the way she'd touched my knee just the day before. I looked at the pad . . .

. . . Six hours later, we stood there wet and panting and

shirtless. The red bandanas tied around our heads had ceased absorbing perspiration hours ago, and my pants and socks were saturated. I could barely move, so sore was I from hauling damp concrete, and each step I took my shoes squeaked.

That was when Erica and Simon arrived. Eddy and Bill walked to the hose and watered themselves down. Simon stopped near the hole, rested his hands on his hips, and shook his head. "Sam, when will you learn?" he said.

Erica jerked her palms to her cheeks when she realized what we had done. "Not again, Sam. All I did today was go to the spa. Simon didn't kill me, except with kindness; in fact, it was his idea." She took his arm and kissed him.

Simon's and my eyes locked, each of us looking through the other. At that moment, I could have killed *him* and buried him in concrete.

Simon and Erica conferred for a moment; then Simon called to the crew. "Eddy, Bill, come over here please. I want all of you to hear what I have to say. This," he said, gesturing to the hole, "obviously exceeds the usual disputes that inevitably crop up between owner and contractor. And I'm certain you will agree that your actions constitute reasonable grounds for termination of our agree-

ment. However, Erica and I are extremely anxious to complete the job as rapidly as possible, and despite Sam's schoolboy behavior, Erica has persuaded me to keep you on. We have reached our limit of patience, however, and this is your last chance. I will keep you on the job, and I'll even add an extra twenty percent incentive pay if you can finish in three weeks. I hope the two of you can convince Sam that this is as good an offer as you'll get, and that it is certainly the last offer you'll get from me."

Working eleven hour days that next week kept me from thinking about much of anything. Work. Sleep. Work. Sleep. We got all the rough framing done, installed the windows, and had the electricians and plumbers snake their wonders. Every time Erica came around, Eddy or Bill would ask me about some detail on the plans or suggest I go to the stockyard for supplies. On Friday, the spiral staircase was delivered. We set up the cardboard form into which we would pour the concrete pillar around which the stairs would wind. We needed another set of Allen wrenches for the stairs, so Eddy sent me to the store. I was gazing at a pegboard wall cluttered with every type of wrench in

imaginable when I felt a tap on the shoulder. I swiveled to see Erica.

"Sam, I need to talk to you."

My brain commanded me to walk away, but my legs mutinied. "About what?"

"I'm afraid."

"Of what?" I asked.

"Of Simon. I think he wants to kill me." Those same eyes that had poured out sweet seduction for weeks were transfixed by pure fear.

"Why do you think that? Has he done anything to you?"

"It's not what he's done; it's the way he looks at me. Sam, I'm petrified." She threw her arms around me and began to sob, right there between the socket wrenches and the vise-grips.

I started to push her away, but instead I grabbed her tight and squeezed. "I'll never let anything happen to you," I heard myself say, in a tone of voice that has no place in a hardware store.

"What am I going to do?" she murmured in my ear.

"Have you called the police?" I asked, leading her by the hand to the spot where the Allen wrenches were.

"No. What would I say? That my husband was looking at me queerly? And after your fiasco with Detective Barnes, I hardly expect he'd take me seriously."

"Have you considered an-

other of your 'holidays'?"

She dropped my hand. "It's not like that. I don't know what Simon has told you, but the truth is, my mother lives alone in London and is ill. She insists on keeping her own flat. I frequently fly there to care for her."

"I'm sorry. Do you want to stay with me?" I asked.

She stroked my face and said, "Sam, you are a dear man, and under different circumstances I'd say yes in an instant."

"But?"

"But I couldn't put you in that situation; it's not fair to you."

I grabbed her shoulders and pulled her close to me. "I don't mind. I want to be with you, no matter what the situation."

She squirmed a little. "Sam, that's generous of you, and I'm hoping we can be together soon. But for now, this mess is between Simon and me."

"So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, but I'll think of something. Perhaps I'll take a hotel suite."

I was skeptical and concerned, and I guess my face showed it.

She smiled and said, "I'll be fine. I'm a big girl, and I can take care of myself."

She kissed me hard on the cheek, smearing her bright red lipstick on my face. Then she

said we shouldn't see each other for a while and left. I picked up the Allen wrenches, wiped the lipstick off, and went back to the job site. Eddy and Bill were waiting at the curb.

"Nothing more we can do today," said Eddy. "May as well call it a day and get a fresh start in the morning." I agreed.

When I walked onto the job-site that next morning, I nearly had a stroke.

The sonotube form was filled with concrete.

I stormed off to the house and pushed the door open without knocking. Before me stood Erica, dressed in a flimsy negligee, hugging some sweating, muscular ox with dried concrete on his sleeveless T-shirt. She introduced him as Juan. Juan flashed me a perfect smile and extended his tree trunk of an arm. He opened his enormous paw and greeted me like a trash-compactor greets trash.

"I'm sorry for barging in like this," I stammered. "I thought that Simon—"

"Ees no problema," said the ox. "Pleece close thee door on your way out."

I looked at Erica.

"On the way out," she echoed softly.

"Where's Simon?"

Erica ran her index finger down Juan's huge biceps and said, "I haven't a clue. Now

please leave, Sam; I don't want this to get ugly."

As if on cue, the ox turned from his embrace with Erica with a protruding jaw and a diminishing smile. Too numb to fight, I left.

I don't remember much about the rest of that day. Eddy and Bill accomplished a lot; I was pretty much on automatic. The only observation that registered was that Simon never showed his face. At the end of the day, Eddy and I made for the neighborhood pub. It didn't take a psychiatrist to interpret my unarticulated thoughts.

When the bartender slid our first two beers in front of us, Eddy said, "Look, buddy, we've been through a lot together, before this job and during it. I've supported you all the way, through some pretty crazy things. But if you're thinking of demolishing the sonotube and blowing this job, which I remind you is our only job for the foreseeable future, then I'm out."

"Eddy, I can't help it. I'm sick inside; she took me for a ride. She used me. She killed him, and now she and that Latin redwood are going to get away with it."

"Nobody is getting away with anything. Hell, accepting the kind of money they're paying us for this job is more of a crime than anything they've done."

I emptied my glass and slid it back to the barkeep. "She killed him."

Eddy looked at me the way he does when he pulls rank on a difficult carpentry decision. "I don't buy it, Sam. There is no dead body. There is no complaint filed. Detective Barnes will laugh you out of the station if you go back there with this nutty idea. Look, Sam, I don't approve of the way these rich people live their lives, but it's their lives. Not mine. And not yours. If Mrs. Alexander used you at all, it was to get at her husband. If she hurt you, I'm sorry, but you'll get over it. Now I need this job, Sam, and I suspect you do, too. I say we grunt out the last couple weeks and move on."

Three or four beers later, I saw Eddy's logic. We finished the job two weeks later. All I could focus on was the huge concrete cylinder, which, according to the specs, we had painted bright white.

The day after we finished the job, I returned to the house to collect the final payment. Erica was there alone. We walked through the addition to see that the work had been satisfactorily completed. As we ascended the spiral stairs, I stopped a tread or two below her. "Did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"You know, kill him?"

"Simon?"

"Did you?"

"Sam, how could you think such a thought. He's off on business."

"Don't you want to hold payment of the last installment till he sees the job?"

"No need. I'm co-owner, and I know my husband. He'll be thrilled with the result," she said. "Sam, I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression . . . about us."

"Boy, you are good at this, lady, very, very good."

"Really, Sam, don't be a child. You've constructed a marvelous work of art," she said, leaning over and kissing the white pillar, leaving the impression of her bright red lips on it. "Relax and enjoy a job well done." She cradled my head against her breast for a moment. Then she stuffed in my hand a check for a ridiculously large sum of money and said, "I don't think I shall ever be able to adequately repay you."

She walked away and I stood looking at the pillar and the imprint of her lipstick. It reminded me of the human sacrifices buried beneath the corners of Polynesian temples. After a while, I pocketed the check and left.

I paid the guys off, gave them a hefty bonus, paid off my last

ten installments on Bertha, and still had enough left over for a Mercedes. When I arrived at job prospects in my silver Mercedes 200-S, people assumed I was a top-notch contractor; they hired me on the spot.

I never saw Simon again. I called Detective Barnes once and shared my suspicions, but he suggested I consult a psychiatrist. I stopped by the place once later, but Erica told me if she ever saw me there again, she'd have a restraining order issued on me. The next day I received a threatening call from Barnes telling me to butt out.

That was five years ago. Now an accountant prepares my taxes. A secretary screens my calls. My new Mercedes 380-SE has a cellular telephone which I use to keep in touch with the office, with Eddy, and with potential clients. Between calls, I supervise three work crews that crank out new construction three at a time. Eddy is the on-site foreman, hopping from job to job to handle the details.

Once in a while, I drive past the Alexander residence, and on occasion, I park across the street. Sometimes I feel angry; sometimes I want to cry. But if I wait long enough, the phone inevitably rings and I'm in business again.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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What happens next? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the March Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

Inspector Ueki and the Crying Man

by Ron Butler



Illustration by Steve Cavallo

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As Yumiko's ninetieth birthday approached, there were several crisp, clear winter mornings when brief flurries of snow brought cries of delight from children and adults alike.

Okayama is one of Japan's more tranquil cities, situated by the Inland Sea in a zone relatively free of the earthquakes, typhoons, treacherous winters, and other severe natural phenomena common to other parts of the archipelago.

Thus, the gentle dusting of gracefully floating crystals was a cause for joyous contemplation, not acute anxiety, on that Monday morning when my beautiful wife Noriko stood next to me on the gravel pathway by our home.

"Oh, Sam," she murmured, snuggling close.

"Mmm," I said, feeling the expression sufficient for a certain redhaired, blue-eyed American who had found a good home and a happy life in the ancient land once walked by warlords and sword-slinging samurai.

Noriko playfully caught a few flakes in her hand and rubbed them against my cheek. "This is delightful, husband, but you must have breakfast. There is much to do today."

I sighed, visualizing the Monday that stretched before

me. There would be the beginning-of-the-week crush of business waiting for me at the computer hardware company I owned, but that was normal.

There was also, at the end of the day, a meeting at the elementary school our twin boys attended. I knew that Kenji and Jotaro were making good grades, but they tended to be full of mischief and I suspected that their teachers might have a word or two about deportment.

I could handle that, too. What I really dreaded was the shopping trip that Noriko and I had scheduled for after the school meeting. Yumiko, our spirited and often blunt live-in nanny, was preparing to celebrate the beginning of her tenth decade on Wednesday.

Noriko couldn't decide what gift would be appropriate, and neither could I. So I was anticipating a frantic tour of Okayama's many large, crowded shops and department stores.

Well, what the heck, I thought, taking in a final, appreciative view of the nearby mountain range. Sam Brent was still young and vigorous enough to endure even the rigors of Japanese shopping. As we walked toward the sliding glass entranceway door, I heard Yumiko inside, fussing about the boys' school uniforms.

Several hours later, sleeves rolled up, tie loosened, I sat back in my swivel chair and eased my feet up onto the only cleared place on my desk—a corner reserved for just that purpose.

From the next office, only slightly smaller than mine, I heard Masahige Goto on the telephone, handling complicated technical affairs with calm, confident expertise. Smiling, I closed my eyes and thought of all the years I had known Goto. He had begun as a clerk, then worked himself up to chief clerk, associate director, and now chief executive officer. Feeling myself slipping away into a little doze, I reflected that having a good friend like Goto was one of life's great pleasures.

My private telephone line buzzed, startling me out of the brief slumber.

"Are you busy, Sam?" the voice at the other end asked.

It was Okayama Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki, who also happens to be my father-in-law.

"Of course I am," I said, rustling some papers so the inspector would hear them. "What's up?"

"Lunch," Ueki replied, "if you will cease trying to deceive me by making those busy noises."

I grinned, and we set a time and place to meet.

As I grabbed jacket and topcoat from the rack, Goto came into the office. "Lunch?" The look on his face indicated that an invitation was in order.

"You know, Goto-san," I said, "you seem to have a sixth sense about these things."

"Well, on my salary . . ."

I snorted and held the outer door open for him. Outside the sun had driven the thin snow clouds away, and we quickly found a taxi.

"Oishi," I said between grateful slurps of steaming noodles prepared in a broth with tempura shrimp.

"Yes, truly delicious," Inspector Ueki agreed as he sprinkled more of a spicy blend of ground peppers into his own bowl.

Ueki was tall for a Japanese, almost my own height, and the stern, samurai-look expression he usually wore belied what I had learned was a compassionate and understanding feeling for his family, his friends, and the officers he worked with. On many occasions, I had seen his almost ruthless courage in the face of the criminal elements he hated, but those images were always tempered by recollections of the inspector laughing and playing with his grandchildren, or of showing so much love for his wife and daughter.

Goto was approaching the

end of his meal, trophy hunting for a last succulent shrimp with his *hashi*. Downing the treasure with a smack of the lips, he put the chopsticks on their holder and had started to say something when Ueki's portable police radio blared out in urgent tones.

As had been happening with increasing frequency in other parts of Japan, there had been a violent student incident at one of Okayama's high schools. Two teachers had been beaten and were now in a hospital.

Inspector Ueki's expression was grim as he informed the dispatcher that he was on his way, and I understood why: teaching is one of the most respected professions in Japan, and the number of recent attacks by students suggested a severe disruption of the respect and discipline that is so much a part of the nation's tradition. To me, the maiming of teachers was a warning light that something was very much out of kilter, and I was aware that there had been killings, as well as beatings, in a few instances.

I picked up the tab, and Goto and I, without having to ask, followed the inspector to his police car and got in. No one spoke as Ueki eased the cruiser into the flow of traffic, lights flashing and siren howling. Sadly I reflected on the growing number of American schools where

security, not education, had become a major concern. If there was anything comforting about the situation, I thought, it was the fact that my two sons were still in elementary school. Maybe dedicated cops like the inspector could get the mess cleaned up before they moved on to high school.

The principal of the high school, a Mr. Shoichi Saba, was perspiring profusely, mopping his face repeatedly with a handkerchief as Inspector Ueki interrogated him in his office.

"So," the inspector scowled, "you have no idea which students were involved in the attack?"

Saba ran his fingers through the short, stubbly hair on his head. "*Shirimasen*," he mumbled, looking down at the carpeting. "I do not know. Both teachers," he went on after a moment, "were alone in the faculty lounge when it happened. I think that they must have been knocked unconscious very quickly, because no one heard anything."

"I see," Ueki said, entering the reply in his notebook. "Have there been other such incidents at your school, Saba-san?"

The principal got up from behind his desk and went to a corner of the room, where he fumbled for several moments with the heat adjustment con-

trol of a space heater. "Hai," he finally said, straightening up but avoiding direct eye contact with us. "But nothing as brutal as this. One student was suspended earlier this year for spitting on a teacher, and another was expelled for slapping his mathematics instructor." He returned to his desk and sat down.

"How come?" I intruded. "I mean, what reasons did they give?"

Saba seemed to become even more flustered, and I assumed he hadn't got used to being around a foreigner who could handle his language and who also seemed on close terms with the cop who was investigating a serious incident in his school.

"It is strange," he said after a moment, "but there seemed to be no reason."

Inspector Ueki slapped his notebook down on the top of the table we were seated around. "Do you mean to say, Saba-san, that your teachers are being abused for no reason?"

Saba worried the knot of his tie, pulling it slightly askew. "It is happening everywhere," he said in a barely audible voice. "Perhaps some pupils here are imitating behavior reported in the news."

"*Tabun*," the inspector nodded. "Maybe. However, Saba-san, as the teachers were attacked when they were alone in

the lounge, it would appear that some degree of premeditation was involved. I do not think the guilty persons just happened to be strolling by casually, at the precise moment the victims were relaxing over a cup of tea. Do you not agree, Saba-san, that this seems to have been planned treachery?"

Saba's eyes turned toward us, and I thought I could read the emotion they were expressing—fear.

"Please, Inspector Ueki," Saba said, looking away quickly, "I am greatly saddened by what has happened here today, but I cannot explain further."

Ueki sighed, plucked his notebook from the tabletop, and stood up. "Very well, Saba-san. My men are now questioning your faculty and students. I urge you to think carefully about this and to call me immediately if something else comes to mind about this situation."

The inspector opened the office door, and Goto and I got up and followed him outside. Four police cruisers were parked near Ueki's car, and a uniformed sergeant hurried over. "Inspector Ueki," he said crisply, "the hospital staff reports both teachers are under sedation and cannot be interrogated."

Ueki's eyes narrowed, and in what seemed to be an unconscious gesture, his hand went to the holstered service re-

volver on his belt. "I want the name of every student, of every teacher, and of anyone else who works here in my office by the end of this shift," he said.

"*Wakarimashita!*" the officer said. Yes, sir!

On the way back to town, we skirted a small bay on the Inland Sea. I watched as white gulls plummeted down, snatching unsuspecting prey from the water. White. It's the color of death in Japan. I closed my eyes and tried to relax.

I left the office in Goto's capable hands later that afternoon, tooled my aging canary-yellow car across town to Tsushima District, and stopped at the house for Noriko. En route to the elementary school for the meeting with the boys' teachers, I told Noriko about what had happened at the high school.

Noriko covered her mouth with her fingertips for a moment. "It is so tragic, Sam."

"Yeah," I agreed, "but Toshihiko is going all out on this one. He'll nail whoever did it—count on that."

"Are you certain that it was students who were responsible?" she asked.

I eased the car to a stop at a traffic light. "Probably. Mr. Saba—he's the principal—said there had been a couple of other incidents where students had

gone after teachers."

Noriko turned her face toward a Shinto shrine on a nearby hill. "Sam, is it not true that much of the violence in American schools is caused by gangs?"

"Yeah, I suppose so."

She put a hand on my arm. "If the same is true at the high school, Father might benefit by determining who the leaders are—it would possibly expedite his investigation."

I remembered the emotion I had interpreted as fear in Principal Saba's expression when he was giving vague replies to Inspector Ueki's questions. Then I reached over to hug Noriko. "You're a genius, my love! I'll pass your suggestion along to Toshihiko as soon as I get a chance."

The hug was interrupted by three blasts of the horn from an irritated driver behind me. The light was green, and we continued on our way to the meeting.

The boys' school was a square and architecturally drab building situated between a bakery and a tea house. Across the street was a mission school where, each morning and afternoon, the children politely bowed to a statue of the Virgin. On this day, however, it was not the sight of this delightful custom that drew our attention. Instead, we noted with consid-

erable anxiety the vehicle that was parked in front of the school.

It was an ambulance, and two attendants were carrying someone out on a stretcher.

I doubleparked the car, and Noriko and I ran to the front entrance where a group of teachers was standing.

"Ah, Mr. and Mrs. Brent," said one of the faculty we knew before we could voice our anxieties. "I am afraid that we will be minus one geography teacher for a time."

Why the hell was this guy being so casual? "Have you called the police yet? Any idea who did it?"

The man appeared to be puzzled. "Why should we call the police? Hashimoto-san did break his ankle, it is true, but I do not believe that it is criminal to slip and fall in a hallway."

Noriko came to the rescue with an explanation of our apprehension, and after some concerned discussion about the spreading phenomenon of school violence, we got down to meetings with individual teachers.

Kenji and Jotaro were doing well—at the top of their class academically, and liked by teachers and classmates alike.

Nevertheless, as we drove toward town to shop for Yumiko's birthday, I could not shake the worry that no one—not even our sons—was safe when concern and regard for the next

person's rights begins to erode.

Noriko's silence during the rest of the drive suggested that her thoughts were along similar lines.

"Spaghetti and meatballs," I insisted.

Old Yumiko glared up at me from her defiant stance by the gas stove in the kitchen. "Such food is not fit for guests."

I resolved that, for once, I would not give in. "Inspector Ueki likes spaghetti and meatballs. Mrs. Ueki likes spaghetti and meatballs. And Noriko likes . . ."

Yumiko grinned hugely, displaying a dazzling gold front tooth. "You and Noriko thought to go find a birthday gift for me today, did you not?"

"Well . . ." How did she know? Maybe one of the boys told her. No matter. What she didn't know—*couldn't* know—was that we had failed to find anything suitable. What does a ninety-year-old woman, born in a simple village in a simpler century, need or want? Clothes? Jewelry? Money? Noriko and I couldn't figure it out either, so we did the logical—we postponed a decision for another day. "Sure," I finally got around to lying, "and I can tell you we did a good job of it, too. But, Yumiko, what has this got to do

with spaghetti and meatballs?"

"You found nothing," she said with a triumphant tug on what could have passed for a granny gown in my own country. "So the least you can do is to allow one whose days are numbered to serve decent Japanese food to decent Japanese guests."

Never surrender? Death before dishonor?

"Okay," I said, trying not to look humble.

Yumiko favored me with an approving nod. "Thank you for being so kind. To show my appreciation, I will prepare, just for you, the spaghetti and meatballs you love so much."

"Hmm," I said, and left her to the kitchen while I was still ahead.

The inspector and Hanako arrived an hour or so later, and following our established practice for grandparently visits, all of us went outside to romp with the boys for a while. The air was a brisk, dry cold, and my stomach was voicing its desire for food when Yumiko slid open the entranceway door and called out the Japanese equivalent of "soup's on."

We all took seats at the long, western-style table in the kitchen after washing up, and Yumiko began serving. For the rest of my family and in-laws, it was broiled eel and rice, a salad that would have created envy among the cordon bleu

chefs of the world, and mountains of freshly baked, buttered rolls.

For me, it was, as promised, spaghetti and meatballs. I had polished that off and was exchanging knife and fork for chopsticks to sample the eel when we heard the unmistakable shattering of glass from the family room. Inspector Ueki and I dashed out: the wide glass sliding door leading out to the patio had a huge hole in it, and more to my astonishment, Ueki's hand was at the spot where his weapon was holstered while on duty as he stared at an object on the tatami. It was a large rock, one of many like those that lay loose around the bulldozed parking area in front of our house.

"Probably nothing but kids playing," I said.

Ueki's hand moved to his shirt pocket and removed a pack of cigarettes. "It is dark out, Sam, and most children are in their homes, doing homework or eating their meals."

Noriko, now standing at my side, also was frowning. "We know all of the children in this neighborhood, Sam. They are friends of Kenji and Jotaro. I do not believe any of them would do such a thing."

The boys, standing behind us with Yumiko and Mrs. Ueki, agreed, but Yumiko did not. "You can believe this old wom-

an—someone needs a lesson in manners.” She mumbled something about a new generation of rowdies and herded the boys back to the kitchen to finish eating.

The inspector and I stepped out on the patio while Noriko taped a section of newspaper against the jagged hole. “Remain alert, Sam,” Ueki said.

I was sure the inspector was understandably overreacting to the violent incident at the high school but decided to humor him. “You bet. I’ll keep a golf club in the room tonight. Incidentally,” I added, “what do you think of Noriko’s suggestion that a gang is involved?”

“That,” he said after crushing his cigarette out in the gravel edging the patio, “is one reason I am so worried. Gang behavior often is irrationally brutal.”

I pulled my house kimono tighter in the cold night air. “What did your men find out when they questioned people at the school?”

Ueki faced me, jaws clenched. “No one said anything useful.”

“They didn’t know anything?”

“My men felt that they were hiding information—or that they were afraid. Tomorrow I will return to the school personally, Sam. We cannot tolerate more of these savage attacks.”

“It’ll work out, Toshihiko,” I said as we turned to go back inside.

From somewhere in the night, I thought I heard harsh laughter.

The pace at the office on Tuesday morning was hurried. We were opening a branch in Osaka, and there were a million details that required immediate attention. At ten A.M., following established routine, Goto came in for a cup of black coffee to be sipped while we discussed problems and mapped out strategy and logistics.

When we were finished, he stood up, stretched, and tugged at the black sleeve garters that were an essential part of his working attire. “Have you heard from Inspector Ueki yet? I am curious about how his investigation is progressing.”

I swirled the cold remnants of my tea in its fragile cup and replaced it on the coffee table between the two office sofas. “Not yet, but the day’s still young.”

“It may age sooner than you think,” Goto grinned.

“Yeah? How come?”

He leaned over and scooped up some pistachios from a glass bowl. “One of our television stations called to ask if you would consent to an interview.” He deftly parted the shells and

plopped the nuts in his mouth. "Of course, I gave your consent, and we are due at the high school in one hour."

"High school? Interview? I don't suppose you could be more specific," I said a bit petulantly.

"It is," he said after licking salt from his fingers, "the same high school where the teachers were beaten. The television station reporter said that you, as an American, qualify as an expert on school violence. He wishes an on-the-scene report."

"Hey," I objected righteously, "we never had any trouble in my school. Sass a teacher and it was off to the principal's office."

"So," Goto replied. "This will provide an excellent opportunity for you to dispel misconceptions, to bring clarity into obscure areas, to correct false stereotypes. Please remember, we leave in an hour."

"We?"

"If I made the arrangements, then it is my duty to accompany you," he explained.

That made sense. Or did it? "Okay, Masahige," I sighed, "I'll drive."

"*Iti desho*. That'll be fine. After the interview, we can go to lunch—on me. And, if Inspector Ueki is still at the school, I will invite him also."

I was thinking of a place that specialized in iced crab and lobster—at outrageous prices.

"Something simple," I said with what I hoped was a straight face.

Shortly after the camera crew set up by the front steps of the high school, Inspector Ueki emerged from the building flanked by two uniformed officers. He appeared to be surprised to see me there with Goto but graciously consented to take part in the interview. The inspector, in response to questions, said that there was no indication of who had attacked the teachers yet, but that the Okayama Police Department would contribute whatever resources were needed to apprehend the guilty and to assure that it did not happen again.

For my own part, I tried to give a balanced picture of the problem of school violence in the States, but pointed out that I was no expert. I made an educated guess—that kids who come from caring families in communities where *everyone* cares seem to do okay. "Maybe that's too simple," I apologized.

"Simplicity is a form of truth," Ueki smiled.

The interview was over, and as the camera crew started putting the equipment away, I asked the inspector how the morning's questioning had gone.

"The results are indefinite," he replied, "but there are two possibilities I wish to pursue. I

have a list of several students who have an unusual number of unexcused absences—and Principal Saba called in to say that he was ill today.”

“Excuse me,” Goto said, “I can understand why continued truancy might suggest a problem, but surely Saba-san’s illness does not make him a suspect.”

Ueki nodded. “Yesterday, two of Saba’s teachers were subjected to inhuman treatment in this school. I think it highly unusual that he would fail to appear when he knew the investigation would be continuing.”

I glanced up at a classroom window and saw several students staring down at us. “What’s your next move, To-shihiko?”

The inspector kicked at a pebble. “I am going to make an unannounced call on Saba-san, Sam. I do not believe that he is telling what he knows, and I want the reason.”

“Mind if I tag along?”

“I suppose,” he grinned, “that your status as our city’s resident expert on school violence justifies your presence.”

Goto held out his hand. “It would be better if I returned to the office to monitor our Osaka venture. If you will give me your car keys, I will go now.”

I complied. “This shouldn’t take long, so maybe you can still treat us to a late lunch.”

Goto gave me a noncommittal look and uttered something to the effect that he wouldn’t be holding his breath.

Shoichi Saba’s house was, I thought, a relic of the past, tucked tightly between abodes that seemed equally as old. A stunted cryptomeria grew to one side of the two story wood structure, and some of the grey roof tiles were broken.

There was no doorbell, so Inspector Ueki knocked several times. No one answered, so he knocked again, this time calling out. “Police!”

Again there was no response. I tested the door with my hand. It eased open several centimeters, revealing a darkened hallway. Inspector Ueki gave the door another, harder push, and we entered.

“Saba!” Ueki shouted.

Faintly, from the rear of the house, we heard a moan. The inspector drew his service revolver, and motioned for me to stay behind him as we made our way cautiously toward the sound.

Shoichi Saba was lying on the frayed tatami of a sleeping room, knees drawn up toward his chest, bleeding profusely

from the scalp. His face was battered, and I winced involuntarily at his obviously severe pain.

"In . . . back," he managed to say. "Hiding."

Ueki, weapon at the ready, ran in the direction Saba was pointing. The door at the rear was ajar, and we stepped out into a small, neglected garden. There was an old fashioned bath shed propped against the house, and as we approached, we saw three people cutting around the rear of the adjacent house.

The inspector yelled out a command to halt, and took aim. But then, facial muscles set in a look of complete frustration, he lowered the weapon and ran after them.

They were quicker, and we lost them in a maze of narrow alleys.

There was no need to ask why Ueki hadn't fired. Although we could make out little more than their backsides, they were wearing the black uniforms of schoolboys.

Principal Saba would recover, but he had been painfully battered about the head and shoulders, and the scalp cut required several stitches. It was late afternoon before he could respond to Inspector Ueki's questions.

Saba told us that he was a

widower, living alone, dedicating most of his time and energy to his duties at the school. Until a few months ago, he said the job had been difficult but rewarding. He took pride in the number of students who graduated with high academic honors, gaining admittance to the best universities, and eventually securing well-paid positions with an excellent chance of continued promotion.

"Then," he said in angry tones, "all changed."

Ueki's voice was gentle. "How is that, Saba-san?"

The word that Saba used, in its euphemistic translation, was frank and direct. "Excrement," he said. "That is what they are, these criminals who seek to destroy the very foundations of our society."

"You are referring to students?" the inspector asked.

"Not all," Saba said, fatigue slurring his speech. "A few only. They terrorize the teachers, the other students . . . everyone. They hate. Everything we hold right and proper . . . they hate."

"I see," Ueki said. "You were afraid, Saba-san, to give me names because you were aware of what these animals might do to you by way of retaliation."

"Not just to me!" he said with a surge of strength. "They harass their fellow students constantly, extort money, and

arrange so-called accidents for those who stand up to them. They come to school when they please, and dare anyone to fail them."

The inspector looked out into the pale winter sunlight filtering through the blinds. "Why, Saba-san, did you not ask for help from the police?"

"The name of their leader's father explains everything," he said. "It is Inazo Nitobe, and his son, Yukinaga, is the long-haired scum who came with his friends today to warn me to continue keeping my silence."

Ueki sucked his breath in with a sharp hiss. "So."

Even I knew the name. The proverbial can of worms—or worse—had been opened.

Inspector Ueki bowed his head, in what some might have taken mistakenly for a humble gesture, but which I recognized as the attitude of a warrior preparing for battle. "Thank you very much, Saba-san. Rest well."

Okayama lay in the darkening shadows of evening as the inspector drove me back to my office. The only topic of conversation was Inazo Nitobe and his son, Yukinaga. Nitobe owned a chain of large department stores in western Japan and was viewed as one of our city's most prominent citizens.

"This one's going to be ticklish for you, right, Toshihiko?" I commented as Ueki pulled

into a metered space by my building.

"It is true that I will have to discuss this with my superiors before I make arrests," Ueki said, "but I can assure you that it is a precaution designed only to make certain that Yukinaga and his gang do not escape the punishment they deserve."

I grasped the door handle. "If you have time, let me know how it goes."

The inspector said that he would, and I rushed to the office to lend Goto a belated hand in any remaining chores.

A thick halo circled a copper-red full moon when I returned home, and the heavy, damp air suggested that more snow clouds were on the way.

I was almost at the entrance-way when I heard footsteps on the gravel behind me. I turned, and made out three people approaching.

As they drew near, I saw in the weak light of the moon that they were wearing dark uniforms, and their silence as they moved toward me seemed ominous.

Was one of them Yukinaga Nitobe, out with his fellow toughs to have revenge on someone they had somehow learned was a friend of the cop asking questions at the school?

There was no time to reason it out, and they kept coming

closer. They stopped, and then one of them moved toward me. There was something in his hand, and I quickly put an armlock on him and spun him around to face his comrades. "Any closer and I break his arm," I said.

"Oh, please," said the boy I was holding. The pain and distress in his tone were not what I'd expected from the leader of a gang of toughs. I decided to take a chance, released him, and asked what they wanted, ready to move quickly if I had to.

The youth I had been holding moved back to the side of his companions. "I am sorry, sir," he said somewhat fearfully, "but we have come to apologize for breaking your glass door last night and to pay for the cost of repairs." He extended what I could now see was one of the vinyl purses used to carry currency.

There have been a number of times in my life when I've felt like a damned fool, but this occasion was topping the list. The best I could come up with was an invitation for them to come in so my family could express thanks for their honesty.

Noriko's warm graciousness soon melted the ice, and they awkwardly explained how they had gotten together after their studies, idly strolling along the streets until they came to the

parking lot in front of our house. Tossing a few rocks around to test their pitching skills seemed like a good idea, and, in the general enthusiasm of the moment, one of them let go with a wild throw.

Noriko smiled and passed around a plate of rice crackers. "Ah." It expressed total understanding.

"Yes," the taller of the boys said. "It seemed a horrible thing to have done, and we ran back to our homes. But this morning we all agreed that we would tell you what happened. This," he said, holding out the purse, "is all the money we have. If it is not enough, we will ask our parents for the rest."

Yumiko shuffled by, dispensing iced, coffee-flavored soft drinks. "The damage is covered by insurance," she said. "Save your money for your old age."

"Right, boys," I smiled, handing the purse back. "And, now that you've let us know you fellows live so close to our neighborhood, come by again."

Kenji and Jotaro got into a lively discussion with them about the relative merits of different baseball pitching styles, and then, bowing repeatedly, the three friends left.

"Yumiko," I said as she crunched on a remaining cracker, "you know that the broken door isn't insured."

"You are wealthy," she said,

gathering up the trays.

"And generous," Noriko purred.

"I did not say that," Yumiko retorted, moving out toward the kitchen with a reminder that only one more shopping day remained before her birthday.

Later, at the time when the house is quiet, I told Noriko how much I appreciated the courage and integrity of the lads who had broken the glass door.

Noriko smoothed out my side of the futon and adjusted the pillows. "Please, Sam, when you think of the criminal actions of a person like Yukinaga Nitobe, also think of the decent young men we met tonight."

I turned off the fluorescent ceiling light and fitted myself into the snug floor bedding. "What I think, Noriko, is that if all children had mothers like you, they'd never go wrong."

"Do not belittle fathers, Sam. They are just as important."

I fell asleep worrying about a proper gift for Yumiko.

The snowfall on Wednesday morning was insignificant, but it was unusually cold. My car wouldn't start despite the standard procedures, and I finally admitted that my battery—the original—had given up the ghost.

Oh, well. I trotted back inside and called for a taxi. I was informed that there would be at least an hour's delay due to the weather.

Kenji and Jotaro were all dressed and ready to go. "The school bus passes near your office, Father," Jotaro grinned.

"Right," said Kenji in English. "Maybe if you carried some books when you got on . . ."

Any comments I might have devised were cut off by the repeated blasting of a horn from outside. It was Inspector Ueki in his police cruiser. He gestured for me to get in.

"Wow, Toshihiko, you'll never guess . . ."

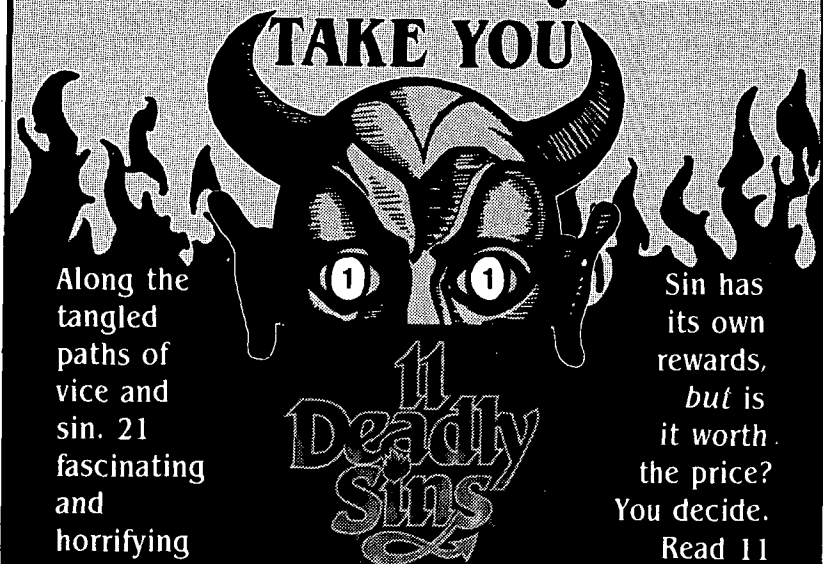
He manipulated the gearshift and headed for the bridge across the small river separating us from a main thoroughfare. "Guessing, Sam, is for amateurs. I came here in the absolute knowledge that you were unwilling to spend a few yen for a new battery."

"Hey!" I objected. "The blasted thing is only five years old. Should be good for at least . . ."

Our discourse on the life expectancy of car batteries was terminated by the voice of a male radio dispatcher. It asked for all available units to proceed to the central train station. Two old winos had been attacked, and there were witnesses.

"My God," I said with more

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reverence than blasphemy. "First the teachers, and now this."

The inspector's knuckles stuck out palely as he gripped the steering wheel. "I already have approval from my superiors to arrest Yukinaga for the assault on the teachers, and I would not be surprised if he is involved in this latest outrage."

My mind flashed back to recent media accounts of something even worse—the barbaric killings of destitute, homeless derelicts in some of the larger cities, carried out by gangs of roving toughs whose deadly, seething hatred seemed to defy logic.

Even affluent countries, I guessed, would always have their share of the abandoned and hopeless—those who were struck down by antiquated or inadequate education and could not compete, those who had sold their precious farmlands for commercial development and spent the profits foolishly. But to kill or harm them because of their misfortune was beyond me. Did these social rejects inspire cruelty simply because the antisocial culprits who attacked them saw, and hated, something of themselves in their victims?

Inspector Ueki turned his face to me briefly. "Evil, Sam, is anything that is destructive. And good is that which is con-

structive. That is ultimately all I have to live by."

To me, it was far from preaching. It was, I thought, an expression of faith from a man who could not change the way of the world but who nevertheless wanted to make it a decent place.

One name repeated itself in my thoughts as we neared our destination. Yukinaga. Yukinaga Nitobe. Son of a respected citizen. Yukinaga. Named by his principal as the scum probably responsible for the beating of two teachers. Did he also terrorize helpless old men sleeping off a cheap drunk?

As usual when confronted by such frustrating affairs, I conjured up comforting visions of my family.

From early in the morning until late at night there are no deserted train stations in most of Japan. Throngs of school children, neatly dressed businessmen, women accompanied by young children, and older people carrying bundles and gifts are always present in masses.

Yet there are places in the large underground stations of the cities where men who have drunk too much can sleep off their excesses. The latest victims of apparently senseless violence had been lying in a tunnel connecting the two plat-

forms. When we arrived, ambulance attendants were strapping the two unconscious men onto stretchers.

Ueki told one of the many uniformed officers that he wanted to speak to the witnesses. A middle-aged businessman and a woman clutching a shopping bag were brought forth.

"Please tell me everything that happened," Ueki said.

They were hesitant at first, obviously in a mild state of shock, but the facts elicited by the inspector added up to a similar version: a few minutes before their train to the nearby city of Kurashiki was due, they heard loud, jeering yells from the tunnel, followed by screams for help—and then the shriller sounds of pain.

Frightened, the two witnesses instinctively edged toward a tobacco stand where other early travelers were awaiting their transportation. Then, they said, three young men ran out snarling, their faces twisted in rage, long wooden sticks grasped in their hands. They leaped down from the platform, jumped across the tracks, and disappeared in the crowds of commuters making their way to the station.

"Can you describe them?" the inspector asked.

The man shrugged, but the woman, combining gestures

with words, said that one of the black-uniformed trio had a most unusual hairdo, one where the hair was brushed up high from his forehead, such an extreme variation from the short-cut style of most young men, don't you think?

Ueki thanked the witnesses and said they would be required to repeat what they had told us for the prosecutor once arrests were made.

He then ordered his men to search for Yukinaga Nitobe and to aid him in an all-out effort for a quick apprehension.

"Sure as blazes," I said as we strode for an exit, "you don't expect him to show up at school today — or ever again. And what makes you so sure you can prove it was Yukinaga and his buddies? Principal Saba fingered them in the school nastiness, but how can you tie that to the poor drunks who were bushwhacked here?"

Inspector Ueki seemed to be very tired as he leaned against his police car before getting in. "The description of long hair for one of them matches what Sabasan told us, Sam, and the assailants here also were said to be wearing the uniforms of schoolboys. Now we will drive to the home of Inazo Nitobe. The hour is still early, and I believe he may be there."

On the way I thought of the woman who had described the

hairdo of one of the assailants. It sounded like a pompadour to me. That brought back the strangely poignant memory of Elvis, the King, before he got trapped in the hype and the rest of a fast-lane entertainment world . . .

An irrelevant tune with lyrics about a hound dog ran through my mind. But this dog was frothing at the mouth.

That Inazo Nitobe was a man of great wealth was signaled clearly by his house. Large and modern, with gleaming blue roof tiles, it was located in the center of what I estimated to be no less than a quarter acre of immaculately kept grounds. The house was completely surrounded by a high stone wall, and entrance was gained through a heavy wrought-iron gate.

As we got out of the cruiser, a long, black limo pulled up—an expensive import from Europe. The chauffeur looked at us curiously, white-gloved hands on the steering wheel. And then the massive wood door of the house opened, revealing a short, middle-aged man whose clothes most definitely had not come off a rack.

He swung open the gate, ignoring us, as the chauffeur quickly stepped out of the limo

to open a rear door. Inspector Ueki positioned himself between the two men. "You are Inazo Nitobe," he said. It was not a question.

Nitobe stared at me first, then at Ueki. "Of course," he replied with open disdain. "Now, if you will excuse me . . ."

He started to enter the limo, but Ueki stopped him with a firm grip on the arm. "I am Police Inspector Toshihiko Ueki, and you will now answer questions concerning certain criminal activities of your son Yukinaga."

The chauffeur blanched and Nitobe sputtered. It was, he said in so many words, an outrage—a true affront—that he, a respectable citizen, a man with important business, should be so crudely treated by a public servant, a man whose salary depended on taxes which he paid so generously.

"And," Nitobe concluded, "who is this . . . this *gaijin*?"

"This *foreigner*," Ueki snapped back, "probably pays more taxes than you do and is truly respectable. Now if you do not wish to discuss this here, privately, I have the authority to take you to police headquarters."

The inspector then launched into a list of possible charges against Yukinaga. In rough translation, they boiled down to

extortion, wanton endangerment, terroristic threatening, assault, and battery.

"And you, Nitobe-san," Ueki concluded, "are liable for full financial restitution to the victims."

Inazo Nitobe seemed to wilt under the inspector's glare. He told the chauffeur to wait, then nodded toward his house. "I think we should go in to discuss this."

After exchanging street shoes for slippers, we went to a western-style office that could have doubled as a showroom for gleaming mahogany, leather, and marble topped furnishings. Nitobe seated himself behind a desk that took up almost a whole wall of the room, and Ueki and I sank back into two overstuffed chairs. "Please tell me everything," Nitobe said with no trace of his earlier disdain.

Inspector Ueki complied, referring to his notebook occasionally, leaving out no details, including the nature of the injuries to the two winos at the train station, and mentioning the physical description of one of the perpetrators offered by Saba-san and the woman witness.

At this point, the man of affluence crumbled. Lips quivering, eyes squeezed close, he began to cry. "I gave Yukinaga

everything," he sobbed. "Money, the best stereo equipment—whatever he wanted."

Ueki stared at the crying man scornfully. "What you did not give your son was discipline and a sense of responsibility."

Inazo Nitobe didn't argue the point. "I know," he blubbered. "In my innermost being, I know. I have seen what he is becoming, but always I was too busy, too involved in business—trips and meetings, always."

"Tell me," I said, "what about Mrs. Nitobe? Doesn't she know about your son's . . . problems?"

Nitobe brushed tears from his cheeks with the back of a hand. "He is our only son. I told her not to interfere."

"What you told me," a soft voice said from the doorway, "was that Yukinaga had to learn to be strong so that others would not take advantage of him."

Surprised, Ueki and I turned and saw a pleasant-faced woman standing in the office doorway. "I am sorry," she continued, "but I did see a police car in front, and I was sure that you came because of Yukinaga's wayward behavior."

Inazo Nitobe, eyes still moist, gazed at his wife sorrowfully. "It is not your fault, Ikuko. I am the one who erred by leading Yukinaga to think that sheer strength was a substitute for the courage to be decent." He

began to cry again, his chest heaving with the effort.

Mrs. Nitobe bowed to her husband solemnly, then looked at us. "I will now prepare *o-cha*."

Inspector Ueki stood up and introduced himself. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Nitobe. The green tea will be most welcome. The gentleman with me is Mr. Sam Brent, who has recently offered some insights on problems in American schools."

Ikuko Nitobe bowed again in the gracious way of women, palms pressed flat against her knees. "Many people in Japan know of Brent-san," she said. "I am glad that he is here to help."

"Help?" Nitobe said, choking off the words. "What help can there be to remedy such pain as that caused by my son?"

The heavy wood front door opened and slammed, and raucous laughter filled the house.

"I believe," Inspector Ueki said, "that your son and his friends are home." Ueki pulled his jacket off and threw it over the back of the chair.

Loud and snickering, the three young men stomped through the corridor without bothering to remove their shoes. "Oi," one of them bellowed to no one in particular. Hey! "There's a cop car out front. Someone get a parking ticket?"

Inspector Ueki stretched out his long arms and yanked two of them into the office. Without considering the implications of foreign intervention in a domestic matter, I snagged the other one and nudged the door shut with a toe.

Eyes widened, mouths gaped. The tall, angry-eyed Ueki, I thought with a mental grin, must have jangled every guilt-ridden nerve in their bodies, a spectre of retribution made larger by the sight of the revolver holstered on his belt.

The inspector dispensed with the formalities. One hand moved slowly to the top of the upswept hairdo of the captive to his right.

"Yukinaga Nitobe?" Ueki grinned as he said it. "I am an officer of the law here to arrest you."

Young Nitobe-san snarled and made as if to brush Ueki's hand aside, the corners of his mouth curled up in what I presumed he meant to be a manly show of defiance. The inspector smiled broadly, got a firm grasp on the pompadour—and lifted Yukinaga clear of the floor. Yukinaga began flailing with his arms, uttering indecencies about cops, the law, and a lot of other things that civilized people value dearly. He growled and he blustered, and then—he spit.

Inspector Ueki's expression did not change. Ignoring the

spittle, he exchanged the pompadour grasp for a classical wrestler's hold, upended Yukinaga, and, hunkering down in a swift, graceful move, turned the now screaming youth over his knee.

"I have learned from Brentsan," he said to Yukinaga's father, "that a form of discipline known as spanking once prevailed in America. Would you mind if I tried this technique?"

Inazo Nitobe considered while Yukinaga howled and his companions cowered. "Dozo," he consented. Please.

Ueki's hand rose and fell with resounding claps against that portion of the human anatomy known as the gluteus maximus. Yukinaga writhed and squirmed and cursed, but, after a period sufficient to establish the inspector's resolve, his tone and the basic meaning of his articulations changed.

At first he pleaded, then he begged, and finally he said, albeit haltingly, what I considered the magic phrase. "I am sorry."

Not ungently, Ueki let Yukinaga Nitobe roll to the plush carpeting of his father's office and confronted Yukinaga's two companions, who seemed to be on the verge of hyperventilation. "Both of you also are under arrest," he said. "Do you wish to appear before the pros-

ecutor first, or do you have the fortitude to admit your stupidity to me?"

I don't know if it was fortitude or fear, but they spoke, all the while averting their eyes from Yukinaga, who had managed to achieve a sitting position after his humiliation. The gist of what they stammered was, despite the difference in culture and language, somehow familiar—they really knew what they were doing was wrong but didn't know how to say no to their rich buddy. They went after the two teachers, who always took a tea break at the same time, because the gentlemen in question had threatened to fail them for missing so many classes. And the two old winos? Because Yukinaga said it would be fun—that no one would really care.

Ueki, arms folded across his chest, listened patiently, then repeated the treatment first administered to Yukinaga. "Soon you and your parents will appear before the prosecutor. I advise you to be completely honest—and to repent. Now, without delay, both of you get back to school. I will be in touch with Principal Saba shortly." He gestured for Yukinaga to halt. "Not you. Before you return to school to make your apologies to the faculty and all of the other students, there is another stop."

Yukinaga's eyes posed the logical question.

"To a barbershop," Ueki said, "if your father does not object."

Inazo Nitobe shook his head in assent and thrust a banknote toward his son. "Bring back the change, Yukinaga—without fail."

Yukinaga, rubbing his backside, looked shocked.

"Come, Sam," the inspector said. "After the barber has done his work, we will visit Saba-san and then go downtown to see the prosecutor." He turned to the elder Nitobe. "Do you agree, sir, with what I am doing? The prosecutor may waive formal charges if you pay all medical expenses and compensate the victims."

Nitobe bowed deeply. "I trust you, and I thank you. What must be, will be."

On the way out, Yukinaga tried to speak to his mother. She gave him a long look and turned away.

In Sam Brent's personal book of life, there are seldom simple, snap solutions to complex problems, and the case of Yukinaga Nitobe and his ruffian companions gave no indication of being the exception.

Saba insisted that Yukinaga, now shorn of pompadour, not only apologize with his friends to the assembled stu-

dents and teachers of the school, but also pledge to cease all future antisocial activities.

Young Yukinaga hesitated for only a second—long enough to watch Inspector Ueki rub his hands together meaningfully before agreeing.

Later that afternoon, before the prosecutor and in the presence of their parents, certain other understandings were arrived at for the three miscreants. Most important, I thought, they would go in person to their victims for a formal apology, and their parents pledged to pay all medical and other expenses. Beyond this first step, all concerned agreed to extend their apologies in the print and broadcast media, and additionally pledged to advise other would-be rowdies of the possible consequences.

Inazo and Ikuko Nitobe, together with the other parents, promised to provide guidance and discipline. From the looks that Nitobe, Senior, was casting at his son, I considered it unlikely that he would need to resort to tears again instead of firm action. It would take time, I thought, but at least everything seemed to be on track.

"Let me give you a ride home, Sam," the inspector said, looking at his watch. "Goto-san has probably closed your office and it has been a long day."

"Tell me, Toshihiko," I said as we walked to the parking lot behind City Hall, "what made you so sure the prosecutor would settle for apologies and restitution instead of filing charges against those guys?"

Ueki paused and looked up at the pink-tinged clouds scudding across the sky. "I let it be known, Sam, that if another spanking is necessary, it will be done on television—with their trousers lowered. The prosecutor has assured me that he will aid me in this task if it ever becomes necessary."

"Sheer genius," I said, looking at my father-in-law with genuine admiration. "That's what I call applied psychology. Jail would be easier to face than having their bare behinds whopped right out in public. Saves the taxpayers money, too."

"Would you mind driving, Sam?" the inspector asked.

Mind! Tooling a cop car down the streets, fingers within easy reach of the switches for lights and siren, and all with official consent!

"How come?" it finally occurred to me.

"The administration of justice," Ueki said, "has left me with sore hands."

People stopped to stare at the sight of an obvious foreigner pounding the top of a police cruiser in equally obvious glee.

That night was special, something I knew would sustain me in all the troubled times that ordinary people encounter. First, there was the sight of a diminutive, aged woman chatting amiably with the mechanics who were installing a new battery for our car.

"Do not have heart failure," Yumiko grinned. "I have paid for this myself."

I fumbled around for an adequate remonstrance. Yumiko ignored me, embarking on stories of days long past, chuckling even when it was apparent that the men from the garage were more interested in the job at hand than in cultural history.

Responding to the silvery tones of Noriko calling for me, I went into our home. "Noriko," I said, "I feel like a prize jack-ass. Look at what Yumiko has done, and we don't even have a birthday present for her."

Noriko smiled and leaned her head against my chest. "She knows that she is loved, Sam, and that is the greatest gift of all. It makes her happy to do this for you."

Sure. But I reasoned that some material gesture was called for, and Noriko, still smiling, helped me giftwrap a bundle of paper currency.

After dinner, with all of us gathered at the kitchen table,

I presented it to Yumiko. "Happy birthday from all of us."

Yumiko parted the ribbons and peeked inside the packet, then began to chortle. "Each week," she said gleefully, "you give me so much money to shop with and tell me to keep the change."

Yes, I knew. Yumiko refused to accept any kind of salary, and we always understood that it was because we had taken her into our lives when she had no more family to turn to. Even so, we always gave her an excess of funds to handle our daily necessities. I always hoped that she used the remainder for whatever pleased her.

"One minute, please," Yumiko said, pushing the packet of money to the center of the table. In the stiff-legged gait of the aged, she left us for a few minutes, then returned carrying another, larger bundle. She opened it, and an impressive amount of money spilled out.

"This," she said, puffing slightly from the exertion of her trip, "is the original savings to which your gift will be added."

I told her I didn't understand.

Yumiko arranged the money neatly on the table. "It is for Kenji and Jotaro to use for their education."

My memory took me back to the crying man, Inazo Nitobe, whose tears flowed because of shame and guilt. Would he not, I thought, have cried even more to know what he had missed of unreserved love?

Yumiko broke into my reverie. "Do not be sentimental, my son. Our concern must be for our young, not ourselves."

I awakened early, well before the electronic chirping of the alarm. Drawing on my house kimono, I padded to the window to check out the sounds of merriment.

Standing outside in the swirling snowflakes, my sons were daring Yumiko to pelt them with the minuscule snowballs she was holding in her hands.

I laughed.

And then, as Noriko began stirring, I went downstairs to fix breakfast for the people I loved.

UNSOLVED

by
M. J. Arterberry

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the September issue.

The senior class play this year was an original murder mystery in which the victim was "done in" five different ways by five different villains: Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney, Peter Lorre, and Sydney Greenstreet. The first villain to reach him actually killed the victim, but left him sitting up in such a position that he did not appear dead, so the subsequent villain visitors each went ahead with his murderous act also. As a spectator, see if you can solve this case from the following clues. Match each villain with his role in the play (forger, gangster, maniac, smuggler, or spy), the method he used to effect the killing, and the order in which he reached the victim.

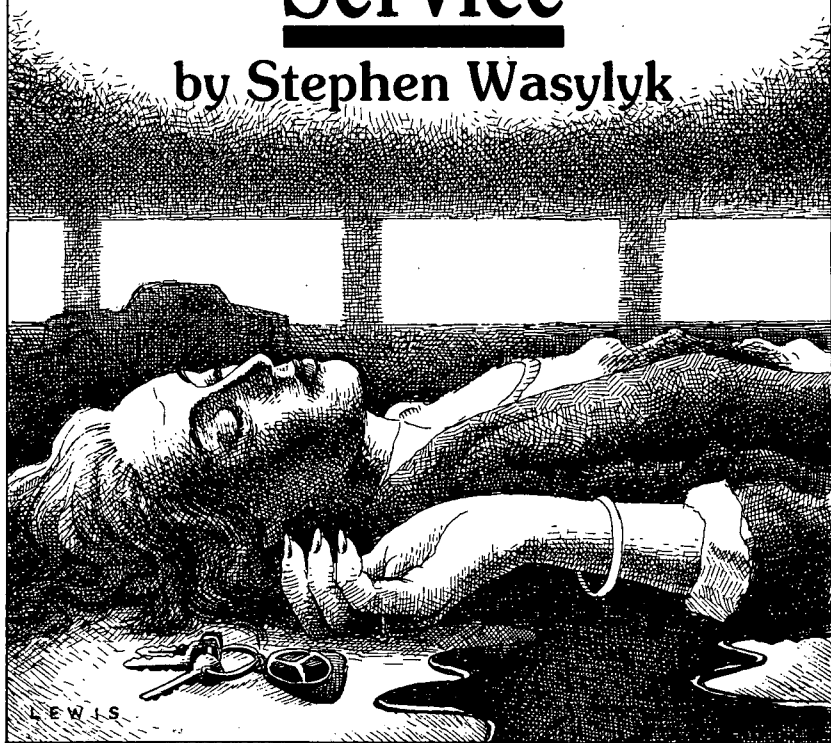
1. The person with the poison dart got to the victim before Peter Lorre did, but the dart did not kill the victim.
2. Lon Chaney arrived before the strangler, but the man using electric shock had already been there.
3. The gangster did his dirty work before the spy, who in turn arrived before the man with the gun, who was next to last in his efforts.
4. Boris Karloff got to the victim before Sydney Greenstreet did, but the strangler had already been there.
5. Lon Chaney reached the victim before the maniac, as well as before the wielder of the dagger.
6. The smuggler said next time he would try using a dagger instead of the method he employed this time.
7. Boris Karloff vowed that the maniac would never beat him to the "kill" again.

See page 149 for the solution to the July puzzle.

FICTION

For Loyal Service

by Stephen Wasylyk



There is no good place to die—some are simply worse than others—and the third level of a chilly, low-ceilinged parking garage with oil blotches on the concrete floor

and the lingering odor of exhaust fumes would be last on anyone's list, particularly the blonde woman's.

White blouse stained with blood, she lay beside the open

door of a Mercedes sedan parked next to the down ramp. She was fashionably slim, wearing a one-of-a-kind blue suit with matching pumps, her blonde hair so precisely casual it had to have been freshly set by an expert. Gold around her neck and wrist and a pair of diamond rings on her fingers testified that robbery couldn't have been the motive.

Glamorous advertising to the contrary, faithful applications of the most exotic balm in the world can never erase what fifty years or more does to every woman's face, but this one had started so far ahead, she was still beautiful enough to give the younger ones a run for their money.

I stepped back as the three with me waited for my words of wisdom: Sidowski, whose steel-rimmed spectacles and thin lips gave him the stern appearance of an accountant questioning where the petty cash had really gone; Munger, whose mass of curly hair and beard looked as though he'd wrapped his head in steel wool; and Fallon, the long-haired blonde who was smart and goodlooking enough to tote a briefcase in and out of a brokerage house, but instead had elected to pack a .38 in her handbag and associate with more violent criminal types.

The Mercedes was one of a

half-dozen cars on this level. Across the abyss of the street beyond the waist-high parapet, a narrow white limestone building stood alone, those once on either side now demolished.

"Sidowski," I said, "make a note of the plate numbers of those cars and track down the drivers. You know what to ask. Munger, the view of any possible witness in the surrounding buildings is cut off except for someone in that white building. Check it out. Fallon, she's wearing at least three thousand in jewelry. Make sure the photographer focuses in on it, make a list, and tell the forensic people I want it all in my office this afternoon in a sealed envelope and with no light-hearted excuses that something fell off while the body was being transported. Have the fingerprint man check her handbag first and bring it to me. We'll go through it together. Relatives have been known to turn up and insist the victim always carried a few thousand in cash while shopping."

Fallon smiled a smile that could have moved a ton of junk bonds in the blink of an eye. "Feeling a bit cynical this morning, lieutenant?"

"The driving force of most of humanity is greed. Move."

Five minutes later, she placed the matching handbag on the

trunk of the Mercedes, the smooth, dark blue, cream-soft leather showing traces of fingerprint powder.

"All the prints appear to be hers, lieutenant."

The woman's wallet held twenty-two dollars in one compartment, some odd coins in another, a driver's license, and three credit cards. She probably never carried much money. When a smile and "charge it, please," wasn't enough, she used one of the credit cards.

Fallon handed me the license.

Alexandra Spence.

"Funny," I said. "I never knew her name."

"You recognized her?"

I motioned toward her notebook. "List the contents. I'll take you down Memory Lane later."

Later came quickly because there was nothing there. The garage was the lock-it-and-leave-it type. An automatic dispenser thrust a ticket at you on the way in and a lone attendant collected your money on the way out. He couldn't be expected to recall everyone who passed his small booth, but he did know that Alexandra Spence parked there regularly. Where she went, he neither knew nor cared.

On a hunch about the hair, I walked down the street to a

salon named Mr. Anton to find she was a regular customer. With the business acumen that often resides in strange individuals, Mr. Anton offered valet parking and was deeply hurt because Mrs. Spence preferred to park her car herself. My news left him weeping, either because he liked her or he'd lost a steady customer and big tipper.

Munger reported that the floor opposite was used as a store-room and no one had been in it all morning.

It appeared that someone had known Alexandra Spence's schedule, waited for her to return from the salon, and shot her expertly with a small caliber revolver, which made little noise and left no shell casing behind. I would bet that the garage floor had been deserted and if it hadn't been, the killing would have been postponed, and perhaps had been postponed before.

What we needed to know was who wanted her dead and why, and work backward from there. But if we found a likely candidate, proving it might be impossible.

Fallon drove much better than I did, so I let her do the weaving in and out of traffic on the way to the address on the license.

"You said you knew her, lieutenant."

I closed my eyes and worked it out slowly in my mind.

"About twenty years ago, I was riding patrol with a partner named Whiting in the Ninth District. We all knew her as the Duchess. She'd started as a high-priced call girl, saved her money, and went into business as a madam with a stable of a half-dozen of the best-looking women you'd ever see. There was nothing we could do about it. We weren't dealing with street hookers and open solicitation. To put her out of business would have taken time and money and we had more important things to do. Now and then someone tried to hassle her, like the enterprising young nut who just made detective and was trying to carve out a quick reputation. The detective-lieutenant was Casey Moon."

"Good-Time Casey, the chief of detectives with the retirement dinner tonight?"

"At which attendance for everyone not on duty isn't mandatory, but you'd better be there or else. Casey transferred the guy within a week. Said he couldn't stand stupidity. I agreed with him. Casey had escorted her to the door just as I was coming in, and I held it open for her. She smiled at me. She was so damned beautiful she was intimidating. I felt as though I

had straw in my hair and manure on my shoes and Casey must have felt the same way, because he just stood there with a dazed look as her cab drove away. That was the last time I saw her. My promotion to detective came through and I was transferred out. She disappeared shortly afterward. The consensus was that she had made enough money and joined the ranks of the wealthy retired. Pull over. That green canopy is the entrance to the apartment house."

The doorman was a short, wizened, elderly type with peaked hat and coat one size too large, who shook his head and muttered the mandatory "Don't know what this city is coming to" and directed us to the penthouse. No husband, he said. Just a young daughter, and we'd find her there.

When she opened the door, there was no need to ask who she was. She was wearing a white jogging suit and shoes, the auburn hair pulled back and tied off but still framing the creamy skin and blue eyes. If she had intended to run in the park across the street, male joggers by the dozens would have been strung out behind her, the pain and suffering of their pursuit of fitness and longevity suddenly justified.

Beautiful women no longer

intimidated me, even twenty-year-old ones. I'd discovered that with the exception of those who spent their lives looking down their perfect noses at the mere mortals surrounding them, most realized being born better-looking than the rest of the population reflected no talent of their own and behaved, for the most part, like ordinary humans.

Which category this one would fall into, I had no idea.

"I'm Lieutenant Booker," I said. "This is Detective Fallon."

Her name was Melissa, she said. I held out the driver's license and asked if that was her mother's picture.

She looked at the license, the handbag in Fallon's hand, and me, and before her eyes reached mine, she knew what I was going to tell her. She was one of the real ones. She turned away and covered her face with her hands.

I guess I still had a few straws in my hair because I felt like shuffling my feet and mumbling, "I'm real sorry, Miss Melissa." Instead, I put my arm around her, murmured my condolences, and led her to the sofa while motioning Fallon to get her something from the bar in the corner.

She brought a glass with enough brandy to paralyze a defensive end. The girl took one gulp, large enough to numb her

for a moment but not enough to hold her together for too long.

She stared down at the license in my hand. "How—"

"She was shot in the parking garage after leaving the salon."

Fallon was prowling around the apartment like a mother-in-law looking for dust.

Melissa's eyes went to the handbag.

"It wasn't robbery." I hesitated, but the way her hands were slowly weaving something invisible, I had no choice. "Do you know of anyone who might want to kill your mother?"

She frowned as though she had trouble understanding the question.

"Husband, lover, relative, friend, acquaintance?"

She shook her head. "There is no husband. My father, Brady, died shortly after I was born."

She indicated a framed photo on the table behind the sofa. As far as I could see, it was the only photo in the room.

I craned my neck. His arm around the young Duchess I remembered, Brady Spence was a goodlooking guy, but somewhat like a hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed character out of a Dickens poorhouse. There was no accounting for love, but then maybe the Duchess took in stray cats, too.

"My mother never remarried."

The hands were busier. This

interview was coming to an end very quickly.

"Your mother was a beautiful woman. Don't misunderstand me, but I find it hard to believe there were no men in her life."

She frowned again and then half smiled as though she wasn't sure of how she felt. "No men. A man. I never met him, didn't even know who he was. She wanted it that way. Everyone should have a little piece of their lives that was theirs alone, she said. When I was old enough to understand, I realized he was probably married, and probably in a position where—"

"—if his relationship with your mother was known, it would be damaging to him."

She nodded.

"And you have no idea—never heard his name, never talked to him, saw a photo—"

"I looked through her things, of course. Any curious child would. I never found anything. But whoever he was, he would have no reason—"

Fallon waved a hand at the apartment. "Did he pay for this?"

The girl stiffened. "Certainly not. My father left us well provided for, and my mother did well in real estate."

I sat there thinking that she was exactly the right age to be the reason for the Duchess's fading from sight when she did.

I chose the words carefully

"Perhaps we're looking for someone from her past."

"Past? She didn't have one."

Mothers never do.

The thread she was clinging to was very thin. It was time to leave.

I returned the license to the handbag and rose. "Keeping this for a few days is standard procedure to be sure it has no bearing on the crime. We'll return it as soon as possible along with your mother's jewelry."

She could have simply let us go, but she followed us to the door, a good hostess seeing her guests out.

Those nervous hands bothered me. "Anyone I can call for you?"

"I can take care of—"

The face was much too white.

"No. You can't. Not at a time like this. Get yourself a shoulder to cry on."

It was the wrong suggestion because mine was handiest. There she was, hanging on to me and sobbing, and making me regret that the only emotion that ever drove beautiful females into my arms was hysteria.

I patted her shoulder and glared at Fallon, motivating her to hurry to the phone on the writing desk. The man she called rescued me twenty minutes later; a gray-templed, distinguished type named Hargrove who was the family attorney.

He'd had the presence of mind to realize he couldn't handle Melissa's grief any better than I could, so he brought along his secretary, a dark-haired motherly type who ushered the girl into the bedroom and glared at me when she slammed the door as though I was responsible.

Hargrove paced the thick rug.

"She was a fine woman. Why can't these people simply take what they're after? Must they also kill?"

"We don't feel that's what happened. Nothing was taken, even though the killer had ample time. It appears the murder was deliberate."

His pacing stopped. "I can't believe that."

"Trust me. Just tell me who might have wanted her dead."

He started pacing again. "No one. She had few friends. No close ones, really. She led a very quiet life, devoting herself to her daughter. Too much, in my estimation."

"But she *was* someone's long-time mistress."

He stopped again. "I suppose Melissa told you, not that it matters."

"If the man wanted to end the relationship and she threatened to make it public, it does. Who was he?"

"I have no idea."

"You were her attorney."

"I handled her legal prob-

lems, not her personal ones. She had no reason to tell me. And if she did, the information would be privileged."

I moved toward the door. "Give that a great deal of thought, Mr. Hargrove. So far, it appears only he could have a motive."

I sponged at my wet shoulder with my handkerchief as Fallon pulled out into traffic.

"Any thoughts, Fallon?"

"Only that it should be illegal to be so beautiful. It makes the rest of us want to throw in the towel."

"Keep in mind the beautiful ones are just as vulnerable and stupid as the rest of you."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Sam T. Booker," she said dryly.

"No offense or sexism intended. The observation covers all of the human race, including subspecies like Big Foot, the Abominable Snowman, and politicians. How did you know who to call?"

"Am I a detective or what? There were three cards under the glass top of the writing table. A doctor, a real estate broker and a lawyer. I copied the names and numbers. Doctors don't make house calls, a real estate broker isn't equipped to handle tears any better than you are, and the poor kid needed the services of an attorney anyway."

"You have a great future, Fallon. If the cards were that handy, the people must have been important to her. Take the next step. After you drop me off, talk to the other two to see where they fit in."

I placed the handbag on my desk, leaned back and took a little mental side excursion to pin down exactly what I knew about the Duchess.

Some people have excellent recall, which is a nice talent for winning money at game shows, but serves no other useful purpose. I'd always felt that memorizing specifics wastes precious brain space that can be used more productively. If I really wanted to know something, I could always look it up or ask someone who knew.

My one-time partner, Whiting, had spent his last fifteen years in the Ninth before retiring as a sergeant.

I called, asked how he was, and listened to him complain about the slugs feasting on his garden before saying, "Remember the Duchess?"

"Who could forget her? Why?"

"Someone shot her a few hours ago."

"That's too bad. Don't tell me she was still in the same business."

"I think not. Exactly how long ago did she fade away?"

"Let's see. She was around when that nut with the shotgun took over the jewelry store, but she was gone when the apartment house burned down, which was a year later. Just about twenty-two years ago, Booker, give or take a few months."

I hoped I didn't end up using similar mileposts to measure my life.

"There was talk about her having protection in high places, but I don't remember hearing a name. Do you?"

"From senators to congressmen to the mayor and the chief of police, with a few of the big money boys thrown in. Depended on whose imagination was working best that day. Why? You thinking that someone out of her past iced her?"

"It's a possibility. Here's what I have: It looks as though she went from the Duchess to married respectability because she had too much class to be a pregnant madam. Her daughter is just about twenty-one. The father was someone named Brady Spence, who died shortly after the baby was born."

He chuckled. "I'm sure he did. The last time I saw him, he already had one foot in the grave. But Brady Spence? You wouldn't remember him because he was sent up for mugging an old man for drug money right before you were assigned

to the district. He'd have been out in a year and shooting himself up again. No way someone like the Duchess would have been involved with him."

"You're saying he couldn't have been the father?"

"His brain was so far gone, he wouldn't have known how to go about it, even by instinct. In spite of her profession, the Duchess had a lot of pride. I'll take a guess and say she needed a name on the marriage and birth certificates so the kid wouldn't ask a lot of questions when she grew up, but it had to be someone who wouldn't be around long enough to cause any embarrassment. If she had too much class to be a pregnant madam, she had too much class to have an illegitimate child. Today it's almost a badge of honor, but twenty-two years ago—"

He could be right. A quiet ceremony with Spence getting enough money to send him to junkie's heaven and after he was gone, a nice grave and headstone to show the girl when she became old enough to ask.

"And I'm sure Spence had no relatives."

"None on the record, but if any ever turned up, she wouldn't have to be ashamed of them. He didn't come out of the gutter. Dope pulled him into it. Hey, maybe the real father didn't

know, finally found out, caught up to her and—" The shrug was in his voice. "Some men might get very pissed off about not being told."

"Oh, I think he knew. She's been someone's mistress ever since. It wouldn't be the first time a prominent man kept the mother of his illegitimate child on the side."

"Yeah, but if that's the case, why would he kill her?"

"How the hell would I know? As the supermarket sleaze mags say, maybe the flaming passion of their love faded into the cold ashes of .22 caliber hate. I'd ask him but no one seems to know who he is. I was hoping you could provide a name or two."

"None comes to mind. If one does, I'll call. If I don't, you can still stake out the funeral. He may show up."

"Not if he pulled the trigger. Thanks for taking the time away from slug warfare. How do you get rid of them?"

"Put out saucers of beer. They get drunk and drown."

I'd always heard retirement did strange things to people.

"Sure they do," I said soothingly.

I regarded the handbag thoughtfully after I hung up.

Rest in peace, Duchess. However you went about it, you did what you wanted to do—raise an innocent beauty who knows

nothing of what you were. If she ever finds out, it won't be from me if I can help it.

I unzipped the bag and emptied the contents on the desk. She'd died with her car keys in her hand, and Fallon had turned them over to the tow truck operator who had taken the car to the impound lot. Left were the wallet, a folding leather case with photos of Melissa at various ages, and the usual contents of a woman's handbag, including a flat gold cosmetic kit and a pocket-sized, morocco bound daily appointment book with brief notations inked in after some of the hours: Melissa, Hargrove, Dr. Temple, hospital, Goodset.

The last page was a list of half-dozen phone numbers following pretty much the same recipe for daily living.

Captain Laslo tapped at my door and indicated the items on the desk. "The victim's?"

"Just making sure nothing here will help."

He folded his arms and leaned against the jamb, a heavy man with a partially bald head and a round face that always seemed to need a shave.

"Getting anywhere?"

"Good thing Good-Time Casey is retiring. This is shaping up as one for the unsolved file, something that always made him use words children were

never allowed to hear until our enlightened society emerged."

Laslo shrugged. "Once you've had a heart attack, the department says you're out, but don't worry about him. He hasn't been in his office for a week and the dinner won't give him time to see the six o'clock news. He won't know about it until tomorrow. I came in to warn you to be on time. You have a habit of drifting in on these things when they're half over, and I see no reason you shouldn't suffer as much as the rest of us."

He lowered his arms and pushed away from the door. "Incidentally, I've always known he was called Good-Time Casey for the same reason a bald man is called Curly, but how did he get the name?"

"Ten of us had dinner one night, along with our wives, girlfriends, or any female acquaintance looking for a free meal. You know how those things go. The orders cover the price spectrum on the menu, and the tab for drinks can equal the entree price or be nothing, depending on the alcohol addiction of the participants. Casey started to figure out how much each couple owed. I told him to divide by ten and forget it or we'd be there all night. He glared at me but he did it. When we left, he stalked out first, still mad at the thought

that he probably paid a dollar or two more than he should. His wife said, 'There goes Good-Time Casey Moon.' The name stuck."

Fallon appeared behind him as his eyebrows rose. "Really?" Laslo said. "Gloria's such a nice person I'm surprised she said anything at all."

"Close association with a man whose sole ambition is to be chief of detectives can get to anyone."

He thrust an index finger at me. "Be there. On time."

Fallon waited until he cleared the doorway.

"The doctor is a woman named Temple, who is a psychiatrist with an office where the sofa costs more than all the furniture in my apartment. All I got was the privileged information routine when I asked if she knew the name of Mrs. Spence's lover. You might do better."

"I doubt it. Besides, I don't like the gleam in the eyes those people always get when I talk to them. I feel like they're measuring me for a chapter in a book."

"The real estate man is a fast-talking sleaze named Goodset. Spence started the firm. She gave it up a few years ago, keeping a piece of the action but making it easy for him to buy her out. When Goodset got his voice back after I told him she was dead, he offered to tear

apart whoever killed her with his bare hands, which doesn't mean he's innocent. He was negotiating a deal for her on a condominium in Cancun, however, and his type would never shoot you before collecting the commission. Afterward, yes, but never before."

"How far had the deal gone?"

"The papers were to be signed next week. It wasn't to be one of those winter retreats, according to him. She was moving permanently, but there's something funny about that. She was going without the daughter. Since the kid had two more years of college, he asked her what the hurry was. No hurry, she said. The girl was turning twenty-one and she was cutting her loose. Didn't make sense to him. She'd always been strict with her, and if she'd played Mother Hen all those years, why not two more? I'm guessing it had something to do with her lover. There were only two people important to her. If she wasn't moving to get away from one, she was moving to get away from the other, and that means —" She held out a clenched hand, thumb up and index finger pointed. "Boom. You're not leaving me for no condo in Cancun, baby. Not after all these years."

"This is the age of jet transportation and satellite com-

munication, Fallon. Cancun isn't that far away."

"Some things can't be changed by high tech. It's easy for a man to sneak away from his wife for a few hours. Disappearing for a couple of days will land him in divorce court pretty damned quick, and then the world learns what he's been hiding. If she went, the romance was over."

I smiled. "I'll buy that bit of reasoning for the time being. Our big problem is finding him."

I began to return things to the handbag.

The folder with the photos fell open, a fifteen-year-old Melissa looking up at me.

Wait a minute.

A man named George Eastman had built a photographic empire on people's desire to capture precious moments of their lives. Photos of husbands, wives, parents, children, grandchildren, pets, relatives, friends — ready to be produced and shared at a moment's notice. If I had a dollar for every album and shoebox in America that summed up a person's life, I could retire to the Duchess's condo in Cancun tomorrow. Hell, I could probably buy the entire Yucatan peninsula.

The good times of their lives. People clung to them.

This had been no one-night stand or brief fling for the Duchess. A more-than-two-dec-

ade relationship would have produced photos and mementos she'd hold dear, even if she could allow no one to see them. They had to be somewhere. Not in the apartment. She'd anticipated the natural curiosity of her daughter.

And she and her lover would never have spent twenty years sneaking in and out of motel rooms. Easy for someone in real estate to arrange for something far more dignified. An apartment? Their long absences might not only be difficult to explain but might lead to snide speculations on the part of the neighbors.

Unless infrequent visits would be normal.

"Fallon," I said, "get on your phone and ask Mr. Goodset if she had a nice little hideaway within easy driving distance. Like a beach home."

I replaced everything in the handbag.

Fallon returned. "She did. An hour's drive. But she sold it a month ago, complete with all furnishings. The other people took occupancy last week."

Those photos and mementos would have been there. Where were they now? Where would she move valuable possessions she couldn't keep in the apartment? Where they'd be safe until she moved to Cancun?

I kneaded the wallet with my

fingers. The answer wasn't in there.

"Get the keys to the Mercedes," I said.

Along with the safety deposit box key on the key ring, we showed Hargrove the court order and took him along. I let him handle it as the frowning bank officer stood by to be sure we took nothing away, ready to seal the long, flat box until the estate was settled and someone held the necessary legal documents under his nose.

Fallon and I looked down over Hargrove's shoulder as he spread twenty years of memories on the table, flowery greeting cards and pressed flowers and handwritten notes and small pieces of jewelry, including one plain gold band. Like millions of other people, she'd never gotten around to mounting the photos in an album. She'd kept the inch-thick sheaf in an envelope; the older ones in black and white, those more recent in color.

Most of the photos showed her or the man alone. In a few, someone else took over the camera to show them with their arms around each other. Looking at him, I felt a touch of anger.

"You were right about the mementos," said Hargrove, "but I don't see how it will help. I've

never seen the man before and his only identification is the YLH signature. Finding him won't be easy."

I jerked an elbow into Fallon's ribs to forestall any comment on her part and pointed to a photo that showed them standing before a hand-carved sign that read FORUM INN.

"Ah," he said. "Specializing in business law made me miss that. Of course. The records of the inn will give you the name of the man since you have the initials."

I didn't tell him I thought the initials stood for Your Loving Husband. I also said nothing about that plain gold ring. Even I could tell it wasn't gold at all, and would probably have turned green if she'd worn it. Maybe it was the symbolism that was important and not the quality, but the least he could have done was buy a real one.

I glanced at my watch. "Close it up. If we need anything else, I can get another court order, and I have an important dinner to attend."

In the car, Fallon said, "You have an important dinner to attend? What about me?"

"You're on duty. The Forum Inn. You know what we need."

"Thank you very much. What do I tell my date and what do I do with the great gown I bought?"

Pour yourself into it and tell

him you decided on a romantic dinner just for two at this marvelous place you heard about. Your only problem will be keeping him from exceeding the speed limit on the way there."

She spoke very quietly. "That won't be my only problem."

In her place, it wouldn't have been mine, either.

Wearing a tuxedo always made me feel a little like Cary Grant and every man's ego can use a boost occasionally, even when he knows it's a lie.

Most of the tables were occupied when I arrived, with the exception of the long one at the head of the small ballroom. Only a few people there were in place, including Gloria Moon, the chairs to either side of her unoccupied. I found Laslo and his wife fortifying themselves for the ordeal by drinking something out of tall glasses.

She smiled up at me; a short, blue-haired woman who had squeezed into that particular chiffon gown for the last time.

"You do wear a tuxedo with style, Sam. Where's your date?"

"Six women turned me down."

"That's a lie. Any red-blooded female loves the opportunity to dazzle everyone in an evening gown, even if she has to put up with an unromantic clod like you so that she can wear it."

"I didn't get here early to be

insulted by your wife," I told Laslo. "Since Gloria Moon is alone at the table, where's the guest of honor?"

"In the bar with the other distinguished guests, encouraging another heart attack."

"I'd better wish him well before the opportunity is gone."

Good-Time Casey. Lost most of his hair since the Ninth District days, but all that did was give him a distinguished, elder statesman look.

I ushered him away from the jokes and the backslapping.

"Congratulations, Casey. Have any plans?"

His voice was smug. "The man who doesn't is a fool."

"So they tell me, but I think getting away from some of the things we run into would be enough. Remember the Duchess?"

The hand lifting the drink froze. "Who could forget her? Why?"

"She's been someone's mistress for more than twenty years."

"So?"

"She's dead. It looks as though the guy shot her this morning because she was moving to Cancun without him."

The glass dropped, his face turned white, and his eyes rolled upward. He made a gurgling sound and clutched at his chest.

I caught him as he sagged.

In a bar filled with police-

men, there were many adept at CPR, so he was still alive when the paramedics carried him out.

Only his wife and I were in the waiting room when the doctor came in and shook his head. Casey hadn't been very popular, and the consensus was that if he had made it this far everything would be all right, so everyone else had gone home to bed.

His passing solved a problem for the department in general and for me in particular. I'd never covered anything up and had no intention of starting with him. He'd have known that. Maybe he'd just said to hell with it and packed it in. Now it was out of my hands and the brass could handle it any way they liked.

I put an arm around Gloria, a small, slight, pretty woman, her body thin and fragile beneath the pink gown. She'd been one of the first female officers on the force but had resigned when she'd married the up and coming Casey after he'd been promoted to detective. You couldn't find enough nice adjectives to describe her and she was so gentle, I never could understand why she'd decided to become a cop in the first place.

"I'll take you home, Gloria."

One hand clutched my bicep. "I want to see him."

He lay as though imprisoned by the tubes and the monitor cords. She stood there patting his shoulder gently as if to tell him everything would be all right and making me feel as guilty as hell.

Leaving a barbecue last summer, I'd noticed the two of them walking to their car, Casey striding along ahead, Gloria plodding after him, a slight, gray-haired woman hunched by a touch of osteoporosis, doing her best to keep up; a kind and gentle woman who had devoted her life to an aggressive husband, always there supporting him.

Perhaps that image had kindled the anger when I'd seen those photos.

I put my arm around her as we walked slowly down the hall.

"It'll be all right, won't it, Sam? The retirement and benefits, I mean. I don't know what I'd do—"

I squeezed her shoulder. "You have nothing to worry about."

"I earned them, you know."

Something beneath the words made my scalp prickle. "Sure," I said. "Sure you did."

Our footsteps whispered along the beige, hard twist, last-for-ever corridor carpet.

"You knew about her," I said softly. "Why did you put up with it?"

Five more yards of carpet passed beneath us.

"I couldn't have children. When he told me about the baby, I thought I owed him something."

My mind was still wrestling with that when she spoke again, her voice curt and angry.

"But he owed me something, too."

It was a tone I'd never heard before, not the Gloria Moon I knew at all; the tone of a woman tough enough to be one of the first in the city to wear a blue uniform.

The words hung there, bringing it all into focus.

Mistresses cling to hope and promises. The Duchess had clung to hers for more than twenty years, and Casey had finally delivered. She wasn't leaving him. He'd achieved his ambition, his career was over and exposure of the affair could no longer hurt him. They were going together. He'd been tak-

ing his chief's pension to Mexico to lead the good life with his mistress, leaving his wife behind.

Why not? He'd walked all over Gloria for more than twenty years, seeing devotion and a sense of duty as weaknesses, yet she'd been the one who had given up her career, whose heart had skipped when the phone rang or someone knocked on the door, who had played the necessary political games behind the scenes, subordinated herself to an ambition she could have blown away at any time by filing for divorce and naming the co-respondent.

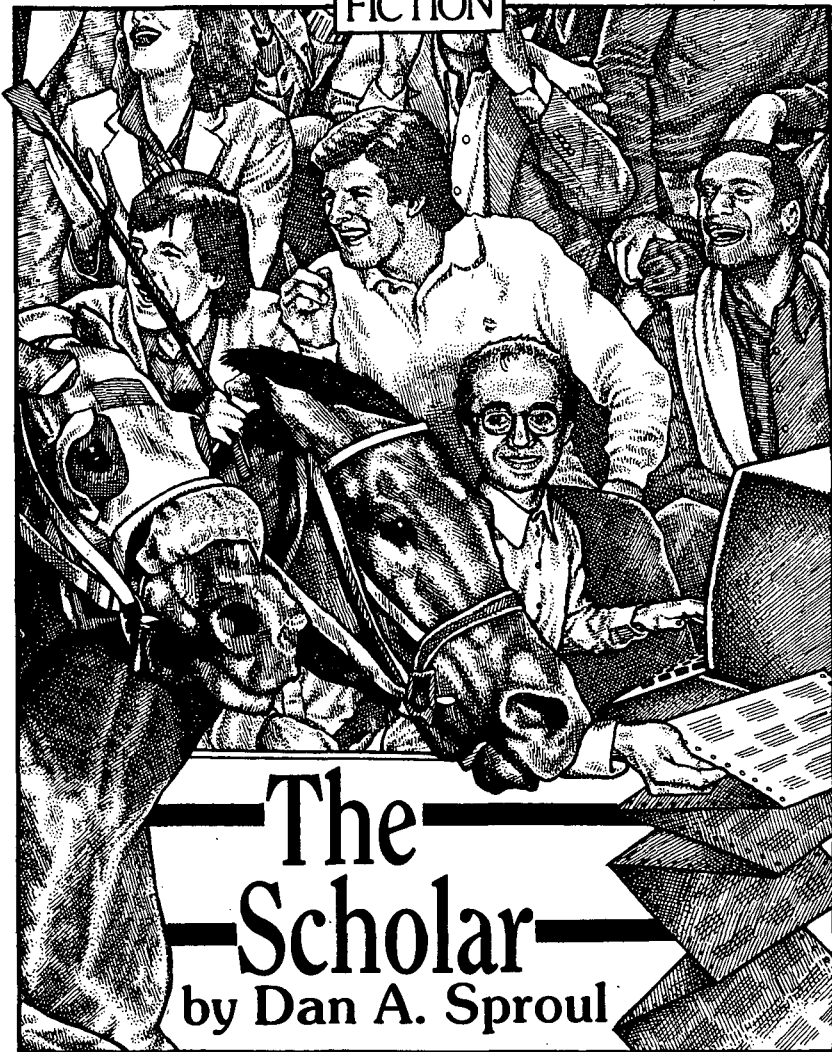
But if he was leaving with the Duchess, he had no reason to kill her.

Which meant—

I looked down at the slight woman beside me and saw no reason—no reason at all—to change what I intended to tell the brass.

Easiest decision I ever made.

FICTION



The Scholar

by Dan A. Sproul

The racetrack cronies and railbirds, the punters and hangers-on, they all called him the Scholar. His name was Wendell Frome. He was a friend of Swine. Swine (short for Swinehart) was a

friend of mine, so to speak. Legend has it that Wendell's problem began at Princeton University about six years ago.

As the story goes, Wendell was in his third year of undergraduate study, an exemplary

student pursuing a degree in electrical engineering with a second major in computer science. In the first semester of his junior year, he undertook for his term project in Systems Analysis and Implementation 306 the structuring and composition of a program that would select winning racehorses. It proved to be his undoing.

After several months of research, and much trial and error, he completed the program. Wendell found that the program worked rather well on paper, and since his budget was limited, he thought to supplement his income with a few judicious plunges at the Meadowlands. Waiting tables during spring break was a bit of a bummer.

As luck would have it, the program nailed down several nice-priced winners when Wendell made his first token bets. Then came the six-year-old gelding, Win Big. Wendell, with unwavering faith in his brainchild, went for the jugular on Win Big, dumping all his winnings plus the five grand stashed in the bank for his fall tuition. Win Big didn't, and Wendell went hollow-eyed.

With a smidgen of on the job training, Wendell would have known that the first thing he should have done was install a crooked button on his computer. And, of course, with

practical experience, he would have known that from time to time the screws loosen up on six-year-old geldings. In any case, Wendell was hooked.

All these years later, Wendell still struggled with single-minded dedication to perfect his program. He could be found each afternoon in the grandstand, poring over his charts and notes. Bone thin, wearing eighty-five-cent Goodwill pants that ended two inches short of his sockless ankles, he ignored the tourists' stares of repulsion and waved to the regulars when they asked how it was coming. "I'm getting close," Wendell would shout back. "I'm getting close."

Wendell no doubt could have made thirty grand a year in the computer industry. He chose, instead, to wash dishes nights at a Beach hotel to keep his afternoons free for the track. He existed in a forty dollar a week dunghole efficiency apartment off Okeechobee Road in Hialeah next door to Swine. And he owned nothing, according to Swine—no television, no radio, no record player, nothing. Nothing except a magnificent IBM PC with a thirty megabyte hard disk, hand built chip by chip, board by board, component by component: a magnificent machine constructed painstakingly over

added to, and expanded upon, almost daily. Old *Racing Forms*, neatly folded, reached from floor to ceiling along one wall where furniture should have been. Piles of printouts two and three stacks deep, head high, jammed against the opposite wall. When he wasn't eating, when he wasn't sleeping, when he wasn't working, when he wasn't at the track, Wendell worked on the program, if you can believe Swine.

I'm Joe Standard, the guy that runs Standard Investigations. I had eleven hundred dollars in the bank. The reason I had eleven hundred dollars in the bank was that I quit playing the horses—two months now. My phone bill was paid. Madeleine, my dark-haired little sweetheart, was talking to me again. I had already made arrangements to move from my one room, two chair, one desk, one cot office with the big blowup picture of Seattle Slew besting Cormorant in the Preakness. The new office, two blocks down the street, had a bathroom. And I was seriously thinking of investing in a bed.

I even had my watch back from the hock shop. Madeleine was due any minute for our first night out in months. I hurriedly scribbled out the rest of my report on Morris Defarge's wife for Betty in the realty office to type up for me the next morn-

ing. Morris Defarge, better known as Deadhorse, peddled a cut-rate tip sheet. His wife was peddling, too. My guess was, her clientele were getting more action for their money than those unfortunate enough to bet Deadhorse's sheet.

I explicitly detailed for Deadhorse the goings-on in the Palm West Motel of the previous night, put a period to it, and signed my name. I looked up to the sound of Wendell the Scholar shuffling through the open door in his ridiculous Goodwill pants. Behind him, jerking and gyrating to unheard but certainly bile-boiling clamorous babble from his pocket radio earphones, came Swine, snapping knobby-knuckled fingers.

How the pair of them ever came to have anything in common outside the ponies is really a mystery. While Wendell meditated over the philosophy of Descartes and raptured in the curious pursuit of particle physics, Swine's philosophical bent centered on the timeless truths inscribed over the urinal on unscrubbed toilet walls; his mathematical indulgences were confined to study of the past performance lines in the *Form*. An odd couple, indeed, and maybe that explains it. Not that opposites attract; rather, a friend to the friendless is usually one cursed with the same affliction.

Swine gave a last spasmodic jerk before removing the ear-phones. "Joe, glad we caught you in," he said. "Really got a deal for yah." He turned to the Scholar. "Tell him, Wendell."

"Hi, Joe," said Wendell.

"How you doin', Wendell?"

Wendell studied Seattle Slew momentarily, trying to jam his hands into eighty-five-cent pockets. They wouldn't fit.

"Tell him, Wendell," Swine urged.

"Uh... I got my program done, Joe."

"That's great, Wendell. Congratulations."

"What the hell you talkin' 'great,'" Swine said to me. "It's a goddamn gold mine. And we're going to cut you in—right, Wendell?"

"Forget it," I told them. "I swore off. I'm finally gettin' it together. No more spot plays, no more parlays—no more gambling, period. You know I quit, Swine. It's been two months now. I'm off for good."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But this is different—this ain't gamblin'." He turned to the Scholar. "Tell him about the program, Wendell."

Wendell began slowly, then warmed to the subject. "... the original concept. According to the studies I ran early on, winning races was not really the problem; that is, the system was designed to select winners

and it did. The program, as originally drawn, selected forty-six winners from every hundred wagers, a feat as good or better than the best handicapper. But it was the quality of winners that made the system fail. In order to win more than was wagered, a certain ratio of odds to win percentage was required. Forty-six percent winners was quite adequate if the average odds of the winners was 2.4 to one or more. Sadly, the program could only generate forty-six percent winners at average odds of even money. You would need fifty percent winners at even money just to break even. You understand the problem?"

I nodded. Wendell had such an unassuming, competent delivery, and on a subject for many years a part of my soul, it was difficult to suppress my interest.

"I ran many statistical studies over the years," he began again. "It was necessary to modify the compiled basic language I was using to support special Boolean operations that would perform unique branching to conditional sub routines that..."

"Whoa... hold on," I cautioned. "I can't swim in that deep water. You're losing me. Keep it simple."

"Sorry," said the Scholar. "I wrote many programs over the

years, mostly they were analytical, to discover if it was possible to find a particular type of race that would support the selection system at better than even money odds. As you know, the betting public, the odds makers who make the favorite, win about thirty-three percent of the time. But the favorite in races with trifecta wagering only wins about twenty-seven percent of the time, indicating that such a race is a poor betting opportunity either because the horses are more evenly matched or they lack consistent form or the jockeys are crooked."

"I vote for the latter," I told him.

"Anyway, my computer studies discovered other kinds of anomalies in race types that affected reliability on the selection side. The studies showed that certain allowance races, for example, contain horses that are entered only for exercise to tune up for another race down the line—usually a stakes race. They cannot be claimed and have no interest in the purse. More often than not, they are the favorites."

"Look, Wendell," I said. "Can you get to the bottom line? My girlfriend is due here any minute. I don't want her to hear me talkin' about horses."

"Well, the short of it is, I entered many races and horse types into my screening pro-

grams over the years. The result is that the computer was able to generate the conditions for the optimum race. The main program examines one hundred and seven variables concerning the horses entered and the type of race. I can now guarantee the program will produce ninety-seven percent winners at 3.2 odds or better if play is restricted to the optimum races. In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to incorporate into the program a projection of morning line odds on each entry as they would be viewed by the handicapping public. The one drawback to the system is bettable races. They are few and far between. The program is very fussy, everything must be perfect. I've been waiting nearly three weeks for a race. Obviously, with the races so infrequent, it will be necessary to bet large amounts at each opportunity. There ah . . . there is an optimum race tomorrow."

Now I saw it coming.

"And you want to cut me in out of the kindness of your heart?"

"You're my best friend," said Swine.

"I see," said I. "And how much are you two putting up?"

"I don't have any money," Wendell blurted out.

"Put up three hundred for me, and I'll pay you back Friday," said Swine.

"Ninety percent you say?"

"Ninety-seven percent," Wendell corrected me. "I might add that the projected odds on the program selection are twenty to one. They're quite likely to go higher."

I held up my hand. "Wait a minute! You're saying the computer picks a forty-dollar horse that has a ninety-seven percent chance of winning? Is that right?"

"Exactly," Wendell responded, producing a perturbed wrinkle on his balding forehead at my inability to grasp with appreciation his golden offering.

At this juncture, Madeleine swished into the tiny office. Wendell wilted to rumped insignificance before her radiance. But the thought lingered . . . ninety-seven percent. Hell, the chance of crossing Bird Road alive on foot at nine in the morning is only about sixty percent. A forty-dollar horse—if a guy was to dump, say, a thousand—that's twenty grand . . . I could toss Swine and Wendell a thousand each and still come away with fat pockets.

"Joe!" Madeleine shouted in my face. "Are you on dope, or what?"

"Huh?"

"I said, aren't you going to introduce me?"

"Oh, sorry. You met Swine

once, eh . . . Frankie Swinehart. And this is Wendell Frome. Wendell works with computers. Boys, this is Madeleine . . . Madeleine De Los Santos."

"It's very nice to meet you," she said, with a pleasant smile and pleasing tone that might make the uninitiated believe it could be true. Wendell and Swine both grinned stupidly, nodded, and moved back a step in unison. Then she gave me a what the hell are they doing here look.

"Wendell has a case he wants me to look into," I offered up to waylay her growing suspicion.

She smiled sweetly. "Something to do with computers, I suppose?"

"Ah . . . sort of," I said.

"Yeah, that's right," Swine contributed.

"I work on a computer, you know," she said. "All the legal documents at Admore and Bloodworth, I do them on a word processor. Are you familiar with word processors?" she asked Wendell. It had to be some kind of fiendish test.

Wendell straightened his thin, sloping shoulders. The fabric on his fifty-cent Goodwill shirt stretched taught, threatening to pop the two remaining buttons. "I am a systems analyst, madam. I design system programs." He said this with measurable pride, his contempt for programmers, and worse yet a

common operator, evident in each syllable.

"How nice," Madeleine acknowledged. "And where do you work? Perhaps our firm could use your services."

She had him. Wendell stood mute; his shoulders slumped; he rubbed his ponderous nose; his pleading eyes slid past her to land on me.

Swine and I answered for him, simultaneously. "He's a freelancer," said I. "He washes dishes at the Eden Roc," said Swine.

The Scholar was destroyed. Madeleine, having neatly confirmed the pair to be lowlifes, and probably horseplayers, bounced twice with achievement on her low-heeled shoes. "Are you ready to leave?" she asked me curtly.

It was going to be a long night.

As I saw it, there were only two options left to me. I could tell Wendell to return in the morning to discuss the case, which would make it even a longer night. Or I could tell Wendell that I couldn't take his case, which would get Madeleine off my case. There was one problem with the latter . . . ninety-seven percent was too good to pass up.

Madeleine stood with arms folded, waiting for my reply. "Ahh . . . what was the name of your missing brother again?"

I directed at Wendell. "You know, the trainer with the horse running tomorrow? And give me the name of the horse, too."

"I don't have no brother," Swine answered.

"Not you!" I shouted. I pointed at Wendell. "Him!"

"I got a half-brother," said Wendell. "But he's a garbage man in Newark."

"Oh, that's right," I said quickly. "I mean your brother-in-law, the trainer who has a horse running tomorrow at Calder. If you just give me the name of the horse, I can probably find him."

"Oh, I know," said Wendell. "You mean my brother-in-law the trainer."

"Your brother-in-law is a trainer?" Swine asked Wendell.

"Wait!" cried Madeleine. "I thought you said this had something to do with a computer?"

"Eh . . . yeah, it does," I said. "What happened was, Wendell's brother-in-law, the trainer, has an owner that owns a software firm in Dallas."

"Yes?" she prompted when I paused.

"Well, this firm in Dallas, that this owner owns, is designing a program for a guidance system in missile nose cones. And when Wendell's brother-in-law told the owner about Wendell being a freelance systems analyst and all . . . then ah . . . the owner of the firm in Dal-

las asked Wendell's brother-in-law, the trainer, to ask Wendell to design a program to, ah... what exactly was that program you designed for the Dallas firm supposed to do, Wendell?"

"It was a debugging procedure—highly classified."

I gratefully jumped on that. "Yeah, top secret stuff." I sized her up as I rambled on. Damn, maybe there was a chance; she looked like she might be swallowing it. "So, anyway, Wendell designed and wrote the program and gave it to his brother-in-law to give to the guy that owned the Dallas firm. But before his brother-in-law could pass it along to the guy from Dallas, Wendell's brother-in-law came up missing, along with the program. So Wendell here wants me to investigate."

"It all makes sense now," Madeleine said. She sounded sincere. "That explains the man I saw."

"The man?" I asked. Jesus, I couldn't believe she was buying this. "What man?"

"There was a man standing in the hall outside your door. When he saw me, he hurried away down the hall and out the door at the other end. He must have been listening. I bet he was a spy."

"OF COURSE HE WAS A SPY!" I shouted at her. "Quickly, what did he look like?" Made-

leine seemed shaken at the thought. I steered her to my client chair. "Here, honey, sit down and describe him as best you can."

"He was very short and fat with really thick glasses. He had on a business suit and one of those funny little small-brimmed hats... and a fat, ugly cigar in the side of his mouth. When he ran off, I noticed he was pigeon-toed."

"That's good, honey. That's going to help a lot." She had just described Deadhorse Delfarge down to his pigeon toes. I turned to the dynamic duo. "All right, Wendell, we'll have to get right to work on this. Come on, let's check the hallways."

I pulled Wendell out the door, down the hall and out into the alley. Swine followed behind. "All right, Wendell, you got a deal," I said. "I'll put up a thousand. If it hits, you and Swine can split ten percent. Give me the horse."

"I don't know," Wendell hedged. "I want to make the bet and hold the ticket. If I give you the horse now, what's to stop you from cutting us out—making the bet yourself?"

"No deal then," I told him. "I'm not going to bet a grand on a horse I can't check out myself. You give me the horse and I'll meet you here at ten tomorrow morning. We'll go to the track

together, and you can make the bet."

Swine nodded once to Wendell. "Okay," said Wendell. "Dr. Hingle in the fifth."

The evening with Madeleine was a washout. Two things were paramount in my mind: romance, of course, and an itch to get my hands on a copy of the *Racing Form*, not necessarily in that order. With Madeleine by my side, there was no way to grab a *Form*. Madeleine spent the evening speculating on Kremlin involvement in the Wendell Frome case. Twitching in my seat as she pumped me incessantly for details, I began to suspect she might be a CIA agent. We called it quits at midnight with a goodnight kiss.

The next morning I stopped by Betty's desk in the realty office and picked up the type-written report on Deadhorse's wife. Swine was waiting in the hall outside my office.

"Jesus, where you been?" he asked in a state of earphoneless agitation.

"Where's Wendell?" I asked.

"He's gone," Swine reported.

"What do you mean, he's gone? Is he dead, or what?" I couldn't fathom any other reason Wendell would pass on this deal.

"Not dead, he's gone. His computer is gone; all his computer stuff is gone—everything but them piles of paper. We got to find him."

"Okay, okay, don't get lathered up. First I got to get to the bank and draw out the thousand, then I got to deliver a report. If he doesn't turn up, we can make the bet."

"What you talkin' about?" Swine shouted. "He didn't give you the right horse. Just because he went to college don't make him stupid. He told me last night. He's not going to give up that horse until he gets to the window with the dough in his hand."

"Goddamn! Where the hell could he have gone?"

"What you askin' me for? You're the detective."

I wheeled my '65 Mustang through the drive-in teller at my bank. To withdraw a thousand dollars at a south Florida bank requires six I.D.'s, a letter of reference from the lieutenant governor, a blood sample, and a urine specimen, or so it seems. We wasted more than ten minutes. I came off the on ramp on to I-95 with tires smoking.

Deadhorse ran off his cut-rate tip sheet on a small printing press in his garage over in Miami Springs. The Mustang sponged in protest as we slid into his driveway. *Morris's Money Horses*, that was the name of the sheet. Black print on yellow paper, there were several hundred already stacked up on the table by the press. Deadhorse's sheet seller, Benny

Stien, was cranking them out of the press, about twenty a minute. Deadhorse chewed on his cigar, checking every third or fourth copy by holding the sheet a couple of inches from his thick lenses.

He squinted at me when I got within a couple of feet. "Yeah, what da yah want?"

"It's me, Deadhorse, Joe Standard. I got the report on your wife."

"Quit callin' me Deadhorse," he said. "It's bad for business." He took the report and jammed it to his nose. "What the hell's it say, anyway? I can't read this small print."

"Well, when you tossed her out after you filed for divorce, she had to eat. She started back doing the things she used to do before you married her."

"That's what I figured," said Deadhorse. "You going to be available to testify?"

"Sure, standard rates."

Deadhorse grunted, pulled off a tip sheet, and gave it the once-over. Satisfied, he placed it on the pile. "Eh . . . how many guys did she . . . ah, you know."

"You mean counting the circus midgets?"

"Never mind." He pulled a money clip from his pocket and stuck it up to his nose. He flipped off two C notes and handed them over. "Two hundred, right?"

"Right. Call me when the

court date comes up." I went over and picked up a sheet off the table.

"Those are fifty cents," Deadhorse informed me.

I fished two quarters from my pocket and dropped them in his palm. Across the top of the sheet was MORRIS'S HUNDRED DOLLAR HORSE, the prime big money bet: Dr. Hingle. I'd checked out Dr. Hingle ten minutes after leaving Madeleine. A decent sort of horse, but he hadn't raced in six months, a shaky bet under normal circumstances. He was twenty to one on the line.

I started fishing. "You like Dr. Hingle in the fifth, huh? You get some inside dope or something?"

"I got my sources," said Deadhorse.

"Your source wouldn't have been Wendell Frome, would it?"

His magnified eyes slid in my direction; he blinked rapidly. "Don't know nobody by that name."

"Really? Didn't you catch his name when you were listening outside my door last night? Where have you got him stashed, Deadhorse?"

"Don't know what you're talkin' about."

He was so rattled he forgot to tell me not to call him Deadhorse. "You got thirty seconds to give me the truth before I

printing press and carry it off with me to see if it will float in the Intercoastal."

I walked over and grabbed onto a chunk of iron loosely bolted to the side of the press. Benny backed up. The press whirled to a stop.

"Wait a minute," said Deadhorse. "I didn't grab him. It was Delumbardo."

"Tony Delumbardo?" said Swine, trying to conceal a pilfered tip sheet behind his back.

"I stopped by to pick up the report on my wife last night," Deadhorse explained. "I heard the kid talkin'. My tip sheet's been on the skids for the last month or so. I needed a big money horse bad, to keep the rest of my customers. Things been tough; had to borrow ten grand from Tony. Figured I could kill two birds with the same rock. I told Tony about it. He grabbed the kid and his computer stuff and pried the horse out of him. Tony's going to skip my interest payment this week if it pans out, and he gave me the horse for my sheet. Shouldn't hurt the odds much, nobody believes the sheet any more—but that'll change when Dr. Hingle hits the wire in front and pays double digits."

"Ha, the joke's on you, fat boy," Swine said.

"Shut up, Swine!" I ordered.

"What's with him?" asked Deadhorse.

"I think he swiped one of your tip sheets," I disclosed.

"Come on you, fifty cents. Cough it up."

We crossed the canal into Hialeah at Lejune Road. I stopped at the first payphone. It was closing in on eleven o'clock. With first post at one P.M., time was becoming a factor of some importance. Tony Delumbardo was a loanshark of the first water. It would not be all that easy to extract Wendell.

I dialed and waited. A female voice came on the line.

"You have reached Barge Enterprises Incorporated."

"Let me speak to Ralph."

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Joe Standard."

A moment passed before a two hundred and eighty pound voice came on the line.

"Yeah, Joe, what?"

"I need some help."

"How much help?" asked Ralph.

"Just presence, I hope."

"What's the target? Professional or amateur?"

"Professional. Delumbardo's muscle."

"Hmmm . . . Claude Stockton or Raul Valencia, or both."

"Can you handle it?"

"Sure," Ralph said nonchalantly. "Two hundred an hour — four hundred if it gets phys-

ical."

I told Ralph the Barge where to meet me. He was expensive, but he was the best. We didn't have time to fool around. I gathered up Swine and pointed the Mustang for Hallindale and Tony's office.

Tony was a big time loan-shark, but he also owned a slew of rental properties and a used car lot that fronted for a chop shop. He operated out of an office in a building behind the car lot.

I spotted Ralph the Barge waiting in his BMW when I parked in front of Tony's office. "You wait here," I told Swine.

"Not if anybody but you comes outside, I won't."

Ralph moved his six foot seven inch bulk gracefully across the street to the Mustang in his two hundred dollar, size fourteen shoes, his eight hundred dollar tailored suit unable to convincingly hide his powerful torso. "Right behind you," he said, as I started for the door.

It was a block building with a wooden door, no windows. I didn't knock, I just swung the door open and walked in. Tony was on the telephone; Claude sat on a nearby sofa looking at the pictures in the *Form*. I left the door open a crack behind me.

Tony looked up from the phone. "Hang on a minute," he said into the mouthpiece. "This is a private office," he snarled

at me. "What the hell you doin' bargain' in here? You want to apply for a loan, knock on the door like everybody else."

"I don't want one of your blood-sucking loans. You're holding a friend of mine, Wendell Frome. I came to get him."

"What are you, some kind a nut? Throw him out, Claude."

I moved to the side and pulled open the door to reveal Ralph the Barge.

"Me first, Claude," said Ralph.

Claude had risen six inches off the sofa, there he froze, the *Form* in his hand poised over the top of a nearby table. He continued to his feet with the utmost caution. "Boss . . . ah, that . . . that's Ralph the Barge."

"Oh," said Tony.

"Where's Wendell?" I asked.

No one answered.

"Tell him," said Ralph, to nobody in particular, his eyes examining a far wall in boredom.

"He's in the back room," said Tony. "Claude, why don't you bring him out."

"Bring the computer stuff, too, Claude," I told him.

It took two trips to get everything into the Mustang.

"You ain't going to get away with this, Standard," was Tony's parting shot. "I remember who you are now."

"Boss!" Claude rasped.

Ralph took a giant step to Tony's desk, grabbed him by

the shirtfront, and lifted him from the chair. Tony dangled in mid-air, his feet scraping on the back of the desk, his eyes the size of quarters.

"Are you threatening my client?" Ralph roared in his face.

"No . . . no, I ain't threatenin' him. I just remembered who he was is all."

Ralph dropped him in the chair and we left. Like I said, he was expensive, but he was the best. I had Deadhorse's two hundred plus the thousand but figured to dump the extra two hundred for myself. I promised Ralph his two hundred in less than five days. He was agreeable, secure in the knowledge that only an utter fool would welch on Ralph the Barge.

We made a quick stop at Wendell's place and stashed the computer gear. The Scholar refused to divulge his horse until it was time to make the bet. He did reveal that the optimum race was the seventh race on the card and not the fifth with Dr. Hingle.

We found seats in the grandstand a couple of minutes before the third race. We sat through that one. I dropped fifty of the extra two hundred in the fourth on Lacy Lady. The race was nine furlongs. She broke bad, went wide, and came up about a furlong short. I passed the fifth, and wouldn't

you know it: the much despised Dr. Hingle set a new land speed record for ten thousand dollar claimers and left his competition gasping in his sonic wake. *Morris's Money Horses* would be sold out tomorrow if Deadhorse's ticker survived the night. Dr. Hingle paid \$73.60, \$39.80, and \$16.20.

"Jesus, Wendell," Swine commented. "Why the hell didn't you give us him? Or better yet, if you had kept your stupid mouth shut, we could have bet him out of ignorance."

"He was the computer selection for the fifth race," Wendell admitted, "but it wasn't an optimum race—too many unknowns."

We sat through the sixth, despondent over lost opportunity. The horses for the seventh race finally paraded onto the track. "Showtime, Wendell," I advised him.

"Let's see the money," said Wendell.

I handed him the thousand in hundred dollar bills. He stuck it in his shirt pocket. "All right, you got the money, what's the horse?" I asked him.

He grinned at me. "Luke's a Bonner," he said. He got up from his seat and started up the aisle to make the bet.

Luke's a Bonner was number eight on the program. He was ninety-nine to one on the tote. Sweet Lord. His past perfor-

mance read like a guide for spotting a pathological loser. I don't remember ever seeing a performance record on a horse that got beat by more than thirty lengths in each of his last five starts. But I was looking at one. Wendell's computer must have popped a diode or something — this couldn't be right. I checked his odds again — ninety-nine to one. Where was the stable money? Where was the smart money? Where the hell was my money? Luke had a total of a hundred and sixteen dollars bet on him to win.

"This horse is a dog," said Swine, nose in *Form*.

At four minutes to post, Luke's a Bonner had two hundred eighty dollars on him to win. Swine covered the ground floor grandstand. I covered the second and third level. Wendell had absconded. Where the hell could he go on foot? What was I saying? He had a thousand dollars. He could take a cab almost to Coral Gables. I was out by the rail, milling through the crowd, when they broke from the gate. I stopped to watch. Luke's a Bonner actually broke on top. He actually led through the quarter. I watched amazed, with gathering hope. At the half mile, he spit out the bit and slowed to a stiff-legged trot.

Now I was numb. Luke's a Bonner trailed. A mahogany bay pulled out easily at the top

of the stretch and began to draw off. I checked the program; he was number two, Am I Blue. Am I Blue won with a smile by five panels. He paid \$42.60 and was easily the best of this bunch.

Me and Swine made a beeline to Wendell's apartment. All his stuff was there. I camped outside his place for a solid week. He never showed. I sold his computer equipment to Black Norman for six hundred bucks.

Three weeks to the day from Wendell's departure, I got a letter postmarked Trenton, New Jersey. When I opened it, five money orders fluttered to the floor, each for two hundred fifty dollars. There was a note from Wendell.

Dear Joe:

I am sending you \$1250 dollars to repay you for the money you gave me to bet. Also you can have my computer equipment. I wiped the hard disk clean at Delumbardo's. The only copy of my main program is on three floppy disks which I have with me.

I know you think I'm a crook, but I'm not. And I want you to know that my program works perfectly well. I collected \$21,300 on Am I Blue. Enough to document and market my selection program and reenter college to obtain my degree.

I am not a horseplayer. I am a systems analyst. Unfortunately, the first system I set out to design was much more difficult than anything I could have imagined. But having finally completed the program design successfully, I now feel I can move on to more conventional problems with confidence. Say goodbye to Swine for me.

*Your Friend,
Wendell Frome*

P.S. I didn't properly thank you for rescuing me from Delumbardo. Wait for a telegram.

I put the money orders in my wallet. At least I made a few bucks on the deal, but the office down the street was rented to someone else, and Madeleine found the *Racing Form* in the back of the Mustang along with Deadhorse's tip sheet.

Wendell was a perfect example of what happens when

you get education. Here's a guy who has enough leverage at the track that in a year or two he could buy a Third World country; instead, he wants to fiddle around with little symbols on paper for a couple grand a month—no horse sense.

I was still a little ticked at Wendell for running off with my eighteen thousand dollars, but I chalked it up and chugged along for another two weeks. Then the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"This is Western Union. We have a telegram here for Joseph Standard."

"That's me. Read it."

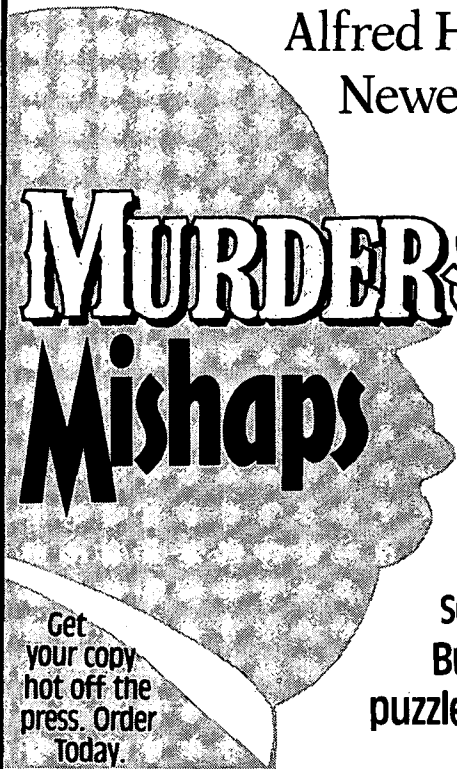
"It says: 'Joe. By this time you should have my letter with the money. The ninth race today at Calder is an optimum race. The six horse, Time for Glory, projected odds thirteen to one. Goodbye forever, Wendell.'" There was a three second pause. "Do you wish to make a reply?"

"No," I said, and hung up.

That Wendell, what a sweet guy.

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FICTION

Seven Dollar Death

by Dick
Stodghill

Looking back, I see the grim irony in having spent the evening watching *They Gave Him a Gun*. At the time it seemed merely annoying. I had unthinkingly wandered into the wrong Main

Street theater to escape the August heat blanketing Akron even though the calendar read May 29.

Playing at the Palace was *I Met Him in Paris* with Claudette Colbert, Melvyn Douglas,

and Robert Young; a light and frothy picture that would help erase the memory of six days covering the police beat for the *Times-Press*. Instead I found myself in Loew's watching Spencer Tracy, Franchot Tone, and Gladys George act out a melodrama punctuated by gunfire. Tone played the part of a good man gone wrong, a veteran of the World War who began using the skills acquired in France after returning to civilian life. Predictably, crime led him to a sorry end. A preview, it turned out, of what awaited me when I arrived home at the boarding house on Dudley Street.

On the way to the movie I had dropped off Paul Bauer at a downtown corner so he could catch a Long Street bus to Summit Beach Park. I would have enjoyed going along, but knew a seventeen-year-old didn't want a man of twenty-three cramping his style on a spring evening. Paul, elder son of my landlord, was a good-natured young fellow. I kidded him along the way about the girls he'd be seeing at the park. He said, "Aw, Bram, I just want to ride the roller coaster and get cooled off."

When I grinned and said, "Sure," he blushed a little, then we both laughed. To change the subject he asked who I thought

would win the five-hundred-mile race at Indianapolis the next day. I told him Deacon Litz and he laughed again.

After the show I stopped at a drive-in for a hamburger and milkshake, then headed home. As I turned my creaky '32 Chevy onto Dudley Street I saw police cars in front of the grocery on the next corner and a crowd gathered across the street. A sinking feeling came over me, a fear that I might be going back to work.

Mrs. Bauer was standing alone on the front porch. From the radio in the dimly-lit living room came the faint crooning of Bing Crosby on *Sweet Lorraine*, a favorite of mine until then. Forever after it would revive bitter memories. While going up the steps I said, "What's going on down at the corner, Mrs. Bauer?"

Without taking her eyes from the activity, she said in a huskier than normal tone, "My God, Bram, somebody killed Mr. Federoff."

I was stunned, transfixed by the disbelief that hits a person when someone familiar dies suddenly and violently. For a moment I stood there, one foot on the porch, the other on the top step. Then, as if there were still some doubt, I said, "Mike Federoff?"

"It was gangsters. They shot

him down behind the counter."

Under other circumstances her words would have been amusing. Gangsters didn't hold up corner grocery stores, but in 1937 anyone with a gun was considered a gangster by Depression-weary Americans familiar with the escapades of Dillinger, Pretty Boy Floyd, and the rest.

I went back down the steps and on to the small store on the other side of Laird Street. A policeman I didn't recognize was standing guard at the door. After showing him my press card I began the familiar routine of piecing together what had taken place. The first thing I learned was that a *Times-Press* photographer and a night-side reporter at work on the Sunday edition had already come and gone. That meant I wouldn't have to go back downtown and write a story.

The policeman told me a lone gunman, a hard-faced man no older than nineteen or twenty, had entered the store at closing time. When the only customer left, he drew his gun and demanded the money in the cash register. What he didn't know was that Argie Federoff, the oldest of Mike's seven children, was watching from behind the curtain separating the store from the family living quarters.

I had guessed the rest even before going inside and hearing

it from Plato Largis, one of two detectives still gathering information. Mike had kept a loaded .38 revolver on a shelf under the cash register. When he stooped to get it, the gunman had fired without waiting for him to straighten up again.

"The Federoff girl didn't recognize the guy," Largis said, "but he or one of the punks that stayed outside in the car must have known about the gun."

"It could have been an educated guess."

Largis didn't agree. "The guy fired too quick. And you know the funny part? Come here." I followed him to the register and watched as he held up a few bills. "Seven dollars. A buck for each kid. That's what he died for, and the guy didn't even stick around long enough to grab it."

"Mike may have figured he'd know there was more money somewhere. He wouldn't have wanted a man with a gun going back to the living area while everyone was home."

"Whatever was on his mind, it was dumb. Makes you sick."

I went back to the street and talked to some of the neighbors. Several had been on their porches to escape the steamy discomfort of their poorly-insulated houses. All agreed the car was a Model A Ford, a black four-door sedan.

The man living next door told

me the right front fender was dented and the motor sounded out of tune. Like the others, he said the gunman had been driving and two young fellows waited in the car. It had been too dark to see either of their faces. Again like everyone else, he said he didn't recognize the man who had gone inside.

I walked back to the house, fighting the nausea that came in waves and left me light-headed. Mike had been a fine man, a hard worker from early morning until late evening six days a week, yet he always had time to smile, ask how things were going, talk a minute or two about the day's ball game or whatever the big news happened to be. He was good to the kids in the neighborhood, too, and remembering that made me feel even worse. How good, I wondered, would the future be to the seven fatherless children of Mike Federoff?

Jack Eddy was on the porch swinging reading the sports section when I went downstairs in the morning. He and Kitty Bauer, the lovely daughter of the household, had been out somewhere Saturday night and hadn't returned by the time I had gone to bed.

"Too bad about Mike Federoff," I said.

"What about him?" Jack didn't look up from the newspaper.

I picked up the front page from where he had cast it aside and held it out in front of me. He glanced up, then, and said, "Oh, that. I saw the headline. Federoff? You mean the guy down on the corner?"

"Being an assistant manager of Wellington's National Detective Agency, I'd think you would have read this before the sports."

"I might have later. We don't get involved with something like that." Leaning forward, he skimmed over the story as I continued holding the paper for him. When he reached the point where it jumped to page thirteen he said, "I'll be darned," and went back to reading the sports.

I went inside again, miffed by his lack of interest or concern. But he had been in town only a little more than a month so I decided he hadn't had a chance to get to know Mike. For all I knew he had never been inside the store.

Jack and Kitty went off together again in mid-morning and didn't return until supper-time. Kitty, wearing the white dress with brown polka dots that was my favorite, never was more radiant. As usual, they said nothing about where they were going or where they had been. Once more I wondered what Kitty saw in him, what it was that attracted her to this self-centered newcomer. Every-

one said he was a go-getter, but I thought of him as a man consumed by an inner fire, an unstinting passion to make a name for himself, to climb to the top. Perhaps that's true of all go-getters.

The rest of us at the boarding house spent a lazy day sweltering in the unrelenting heat and, even less bearable, the humidity that had shot off into infinity. Every little while pudgy Mabel Klosterman would giggle and say, "I'm sweating like a pig." Poor, foolish Mabel. After that revelation she'd drop a hint to me that it would be nice and cool inside an air-conditioned theater.

Bus Bauer, grumpy as a bear, tuned in for the end of the race at Indianapolis. When Wilbur Shaw crossed the finish line ahead of the pack to collect more than thirty thousand dollars, I reminded young Paul that I had been mistaken about Deacon Litz. He smiled half-heartedly, no longer seeming interested. I asked how it had gone at Summit Beach, and he said, "Okay." Then, despite the heat, he went upstairs to the room he shared with his younger brother. He didn't come down again until Mrs. Bauer rang the dinner bell.

On Monday we ran a story saying weatherman Ray Robin-

son had promised relief was on the way. I wrote a follow-up on the Federoff murder, but there was nothing new to report. My Tuesday story said the same thing, but Ray Robinson had been right. Aside from that, most of page one was devoted to aircraft stories. Amelia Earhart had left San Juan on her "just for fun" flight around the world. In Spain, German bombers had destroyed a city named Almería. As always, I wondered about the justice of having Germany, Italy, and Russia playing the major roles in a civil war in Spain. The newspapers and newsreels gave the war broad coverage, but I had the distinct impression that most Americans didn't know left from right, communism from fascism, and really weren't keen on being enlightened.

I sneaked away a couple of hours early and drove to League Park on the south side of town not far from Summit Beach. The New York Yankees—Gehrig, DiMaggio, all the others—were in town for an exhibition game with their Akron Mid-Atlantic League farm club. Hardly anyone seemed to care; only a couple of thousand people showed up. With two out in the bottom of the ninth, two men on base and New York leading 13-11, a brawny fellow named Paul Bearint put one

over the fence for Akron. The game may have been meaningless, but the few fans watching didn't think so. From the expressions on their faces, neither did the New Yorkers.

I drove home happy. The instant I stepped inside the house, though, I sensed that something was terribly wrong. As the screen door slammed behind me, Mrs. Bauer peered out from the kitchen, then came hurrying along the hallway wiping her hands on the apron that was as much a part of her as the thick-heeled black shoes and a perpetual air of weariness.

"Oh, Bram," she called, "I'm so glad you're home. My God, Bram, the police came and took Paul a little while ago. I tried to get you at the paper, but they said nobody knew where you were."

I was speechless, bewildered. Seconds went by before I was able to repeat, "Took Paul?"

A film of tears glazed her eyes. She fought them back. I reached for her hand, unaware of doing so. "Why, Ivy?" It was one of the rare times I used her first name.

"I don't know. They wouldn't tell me. Please, Bram, see if you can find something out."

She knew that covering the police beat meant certain doors were open to me. She had no

way of knowing how many remained tightly closed until the police were ready to allow a reporter to step beyond them. I didn't need urging, though.

I was descending the porch steps two at a time when Jack Eddy wheeled his car to the curb behind mine. As I fumbled for my keys he put his head out the side window of his big Auburn, grinning. "Abraham Geary, ace reporter," he called, "off to capture another big story. What's the hurry, buddy?"

"The police came and took Paul," I told him as I fit the key in the hole and jerked the door open.

Jack Eddy was a fast mover when the need arose. He reminded me of a cat at times, gliding silently from place to place, then suddenly making a move too quick for the eye to follow. Before I had stepped on the starter he opened the door on the passenger side and slid onto the seat beside me.

"What are you talking about, took Paul?" he said. "You mean they arrested him?"

I didn't answer until I had turned the corner and driven a block, then checked the traffic on Market Street before running the light at Goodyear's Willard Street gatehouse. "I don't know. They picked him up but didn't say why."

Jack glanced behind us as we

went down an incline and through another red light at Case Avenue. He said, "Take it easy, boy. We'll get there sooner if you don't blow ten minutes with a traffic cop."

He was right. I still didn't pay strict attention to the speed limit, but I did stop for a couple of lights before we pulled up on the Bowery Street side of Central Police Station. Neither of us had said anything more along the way.

The desk sergeant told me I would have to talk to Plato Largis if I wanted information, provided I could find him. I knew where to look, but he wasn't there. We stood in a hallway at a point where I could see his office as well as the closed doors of several interrogation rooms. Soon Largis came out the farthest door. He was alone.

Jack followed as I hurried along the hall. From ten feet away I said, "Why did you pick up Paul Bauer?"

The question caught Largis off guard. He studied me warily for a moment, one eyebrow cocked. "How do you know about it?"

"He's my landlady's son. What's going on, Plato?"

Largis had turned his attention to Jack Eddy. "Who's this?"

"Jack Eddy—Plato Largis." They didn't shake hands or even nod to one another. I said,

"Jack lives at my boarding house."

A smirk had come over Largis' heavy-featured face. "I know you," he said to Jack. "You're the hotshot shamus from Wellington's, the guy who got all the publicity on that car bombing and then the Novatny case a few weeks back."

Jack was staring at him, expressionless, not a trace of emotion visible to anyone who didn't know him, but I could see a tightening of the muscles at his jaw. It was the first time I had seen him angry. A tense moment passed before Largis laughed unexpectedly and I was able to start breathing again.

"You gave the chief fits," Largis said, still looking at Jack. "No kidding, he went haywire reading those stories. Some of the boys got a big kick out of it."

"Come on, Plato, give," I said. "Why did you pick up Paul Bauer?"

"Just to talk a little. But the kid doesn't have much to say. He hasn't got himself covered too good."

"Talk about what? Mike Federooff, is that it? Look, just because he lives half a block from the store doesn't—"

"We had more reason than that."

"Are you charging him?" Jack asked. It was the first thing he

had said since warning me about traffic cops.

"No. He can leave any time he wants to . . . for now."

"Then get him. We're taking him home."

Largis was grinning, which didn't mean he was intimidated by Jack's heavy-handed manner. "Sure. Anything you say." He turned and went back inside the interrogation room, then came out a moment later with Paul.

He looked younger than before, a frightened, vulnerable kid again. Without a word, Jack nodded for him to follow and started toward the outside door. I looked at Largis but couldn't read anything in his face. After shaking my head to let him know I was bewildered by events that were moving too fast for me, I hurried after the others, suddenly aware that Jack Eddy had taken charge.

In my haste I had forgotten to curb the front wheels, so I let the Chevy coast down the steep incline to Main Street, throwing it into gear once we were rolling to conserve a battery that was growing more feeble every day. Paul was alone in back, stiff, uncomfortable, and apprehensive like a boy sitting on the bench outside the principal's office.

Glancing at Jack from the corner of my eye, I could see he

was still angry. I wasn't certain of the reason. When we were headed east on Market Street I said, "What's it all about, Paul? Why did they pick you up?"

"I guess because I was in trouble once before. Back when I was about twelve, just a kid."

Jack's wry laughter bore no trace of humor. "That long ago, huh? What kind of trouble?"

"They said another kid and me swiped something down at Woolworth's in East Akron."

"Did you?"

"Well, this other kid, he took a baseball. I hope Coach Ricker don't find out about this or he might kick me off the East High ball team."

"Either him or the English teacher. This other kid, I suppose he had a name?"

"Sure, but it don't make any difference."

Jack yelled, "Stop the car," startling me into nearly swerving in front of a huge orange bus.

When I swung the Chevy to the curb across from City Hospital, Jack jumped out as if it were in flames, pushed the back of his seat forward, grabbed Paul by the front of his shirt, and dragged him out of the car. I watched open-mouthed as he held the youngster tightly against his own body and said, "Don't try playing me for a

sucker, sonny boy. Have you thought about what this is doing to your mother? If no, you'd better. Now give me some straight answers or I'll scatter your teeth from here to Goodyear Hall."

Later I laughed about it. At six one and two hundred pounds, Paul had two inches and thirty-five pounds on Jack Eddy, yet he was totally cowed. And, had it come to that, I think Jack could have pounded the day-lights out of befuddled, good-natured Paul. Instead he tossed him into the back seat like a sack of potatoes, then got in himself.

"So, the name of the kid is..."

Paul, smoothing his hair back with an unsteady hand, nervously cleared his throat. "Steve Enders, but the cops don't know it. He seen the manager coming, so he shoved the ball in my pocket and beat it out the back door."

"And good old Paul took the rap himself. This Steve Enders, do you still hang around with him?"

"He moved away."

Jack, who had turned to face forward as I pulled out into traffic, swung around again toward Paul. "How far away?"

"Down around here someplace on Forge Street. He went to Central High. Besides, he was two years older than me."

"You never see him?"

"On the street once in a while." In the rear view mirror I could see that Paul was growing a little bolder again. He said, "What difference does it make, anyway? All the cops wanted to know was if I seen anybody I knew out at Summit Beach Park and what time it was I seen them. Well, and if I knew who the guys were that killed Mr. Federoff."

"Do you?"

Paul blinked a few times, then shook his head. "I told them I seen a few kids I know out at the park, but I don't know what time it was or nothing. I mean nobody keeps looking at the clock all the time at a place like that."

Jack handed Paul a pencil and notebook. "Write down the names of everyone you saw. And addresses if you know them. While you're at it, take a guess at the times."

Supper was a gloomy affair that evening. Everyone was ill at ease, not sure what to say or whether to say anything at all. Even "pass the bread" sounded forced and was said too loudly or too softly. Bus Bauer coughed a lot, even for a man who worked a six hour shift every day in a vulcanizing pit at Goodyear. His wife, pale and shaken, seemed in a trance. Paul picked

at his food uncharacteristically and Mabel Klosterman giggled nervously whenever someone spoke. Even the vibrant Kitty was silent and morose.

They had buried Mike Federoﬀ that afternoon, so the store was closed. Thirsty from Mrs. Bauer's ham, I wished it wasn't because I wanted a bottle of pop. The alternative was walking down to the Coney Island Lunch on Market Street. Jack followed along, anxious to get out of the house. When I asked the counterman for a Norka orange, Jack said, "How come everything's called Norka around this town? Norka pop, the Norka Theater next door, all kinds of Norka."

I was surprised he hadn't figured it out. He didn't miss much and usually was far ahead of me in thinking something through, but Norka had escaped him. I said, "It's Akron spelled backwards."

He laughed tersely and shook his head in a way that made me feel like a hick, a rube from the backwoods. He said, "Paul was hiding something, but I decided not to press it yet. Did you pick up on it?"

"Just once. Nothing will ever convince me he had anything to do with killing Mike Federoﬀ. Even if he confessed I wouldn't believe it."

"I didn't say he had anything

to do with it, but he knows something he's not telling. I'd bet my last dollar on it."

Neither of us wanted to go back to the gloomy house on Dudley Street so we decided to take in a movie. As usual a cowboy show was playing at the Norka so we walked down to the Rialto on Goodyear Boulevard and saw *Swing High, Swing Low*. Even Carole Lombard and Fred MacMurray couldn't save it from disaster, at least on that particular night. At the halfway point Jack stood up and said, "Let's get a beer."

Wednesday was uneventful. Even so, piecing together things I heard at the police station left me apprehensive. Paul was the prime suspect; I was surprised they hadn't picked him up again. I thrashed it out in my mind and decided mentioning his name in my "no new developments" story, by then relegated to an inside page in the second section, would serve no purpose, would be unfair. The rival *Beacon-Journal* hadn't gotten wind of his interrogation.

After supper Jack Eddy suggested going to the Lenox Cafe. As we walked along Willard Street, keeping a wary eye peeled for the mean chow living in one of the houses across from

East Akron Cemetery, he told me he had talked to all but one of the kids on Paul's list and, like the police, had come up with nothing. They remembered seeing him but had no idea of the time. At nine o'clock on Saturday night Paul could just as easily have been in a Ford at Laird and Dudley streets as on the roller coaster at Summit Beach.

Thursday began as a replay of the day before. Nothing of importance had happened in town aside from Mayor Lee D. Schroy's announcement that nudity had to cease at Akron night spots. I hadn't even been aware that it had begun. The wags at the *Times-Press* spent the morning cracking wise about the banner story, the Duke of Windsor marrying Wallie Simpson at a chateau somewhere in France. Months of similar tripe had turned me sour on people. The horror stories coming out of the civil war in Spain, Stalin's purges, Hitler issuing new threats daily, the country's economy in shambles, yet our readers seemed interested only in the frivolous antics of a pair of spoiled brats.

The phone on my desk started ringing just as Jack Eddy walked into the city room at noon. It was Mrs. Bauer on the line. I couldn't see the tears in her eyes, couldn't detect them

in her voice, yet I knew they were there. After dropping the receiver back on its hook I looked up at Jack and said, "They pulled Paul Bauer in again."

He checked his watch, frowning. "I just saw the last kid on Paul's list. She's been out of town so the cops hadn't talked to her yet, and that was only fifteen minutes ago."

"So what?"

"She came across with a new name. She said she saw Paul talking to a girl named Marie Bennett two different times, but Paul didn't put her on his list. If he didn't tell us, you can bet he didn't tell the cops. Come on, let's scram out of here."

We drove to the east side in Jack's classy Auburn. The girl he had talked with, Jack said, didn't have a high opinion of Marie Bennett. She called her cheap, said she was dumb and boy-crazy. Marie lived in a frame bungalow on Ackley Street in a workingman's neighborhood southwest of Goodyear Plant One. No one was home. We ate lunch nearby, went back again and still found no one there.

For ten minutes or so we sat out front in the car, Jack drumming his fingers impatiently on the steering wheel. Then he switched on the ignition and said, "Let's go talk to the Fed-off girl."

The widow Federoff was behind the counter when we entered the store. She told us Argie was alone in the living area and to go on back. Jack turned to look across the little grocery with its high shelves and glass cases and coffee grinder after we were past the curtain where Argie had been standing when her father died defending his cash register.

She was in the kitchen putting dishes away from lunch. It reminded me again that no matter what, the routine things in life go on. Argie was dark-haired, busty, too heavy even for her large frame. There was a possibility, but only a faint one, that she might grow to be attractive rather than the shy, awkward girl she was at fifteen.

She spoke in a soft monotone, repeating what we had heard earlier but secondhand. "Mama told me to tell Papa to hurry, the roast had already been too long in the oven. I started to push the curtain aside, then let it fall back again. The boy frightened me, but I didn't know why. I think it was the way he walked from one place to another, looking at things but not the way people do when they're grocery shopping. And all the time he had this little smile on his face, but only half a smile. He frightened me."

She was staring down at the floor, but raised her eyes just as the tears came. "If I had gone on like Mama told me to, then he wouldn't have shot Papa."

Jack reached out and touched her arm. "Don't ever think that. You're wrong, Argie. He couldn't have gone back outside and told the others he had changed his mind. They would have laughed at him. Rather than let that happen, he would have killed you, too."

Argie brushed a hand across her cheeks. She tried to smile. "You don't think it would have made any difference?"

"I know it wouldn't have."

When we were back in the car, Jack said, "Poor kid. An ugly duckling, but she loved her old man."

"He was a good guy, Jack. Not just because he had a smile for everybody or let families in the neighborhood charge their groceries until they had money to pay. With times as tough as they are, most grocers in Akron do that. But Mike was really kind-hearted. He knew how hard it was for people to come in when they'd owed him money a long time and had no way of paying, but still had to go on eating."

"A couple of weeks ago a woman was apologizing because she hadn't paid anything on her bill for so long. I pre-

tended I couldn't hear. She was so embarrassed it embarrassed me. She said her husband was hoping to get on the latest WPA program for Akron. Mike just laughed and told her not to worry, to take as long as she needed to pay and before long everything would be fine again. He'd be there, he said—he wasn't going anywhere."

Jack smiled wryly. "Some prophet he turned out to be."

A girl was sitting on the front porch swing when we pulled up at the Bennett house again. The bungalow was atop a low embankment, so Jack took the steps two at a time like an old friend paying a visit. I followed at a reasonable pace, wondering what approach he was going to take with her. Before I reached the top step he said, "Hi, Marie, we're friends of Paul Bauer. He said he saw you out at Summit Beach the other night. How'd you like the dance band?"

"I wasn't dancing." As she appraised him with more than a little skepticism I realized she was not at all what I had expected. The girl Jack had talked with earlier apparently was the catty type, always ready to put in a bad word for any other female. Marie was only a few years older than Argie Federoff, but pretty in the special, unspoiled way of intelligent,

respectable girls that had grown up among tough people in working class neighborhoods. The experience had left her straightforward and confident, capable of taking care of herself without sacrificing her femininity or putting on airs.

I was behind Jack so his face was hidden from me, but I could tell he knew at once that he had been given bad information about the girl. He dropped the glib, overly-familiar approach and introduced us in a more respectful manner. Then he said, "Do you know the police picked Paul up for the murder of that grocer the other night?"

The Hollywood fan magazine slipped from her lap as she stared up at him incredulously. "Paul? They think Paul Bauer would do something like that? Why that's crazy."

"That's the way we feel about it, Marie, but he's in serious trouble. We've been trying to find someone who can vouch for where he was Saturday night. So far we've struck out."

"He already told you he was at Summit Beach. I was talking to him, you know that."

"Do you remember what time it was?"

"I don't have a watch, and even if I did I wouldn't have been looking at it all the time. But I saw him twice, about an hour apart."

"Marie, Paul gave us a list of

names of people he saw at the park, but he left off yours. Any idea why?"

She shook her head, then suddenly looked suspicious. "If he didn't tell you, then how did you know I saw him?"

"Betty McLeod said she saw the two of you together. Look, can you remember anything Paul said to you? Anything at all. Even if it doesn't seem important, it might help."

She looked off into space a moment, then shook her head again. "Just the usual things when you haven't seen somebody for a while. You know, how have you been and things like that." She picked up a glass from a table beside the swing and began refilling it from a bottle of Cleo-Cola. She stopped abruptly, tilting the bottle back but continuing to hold it and the glass in front of her. A little of the color drained from her face.

"Now I remember. Paul said he saw my old boyfriend while he was waiting for the bus downtown. He wanted Paul to go joyriding with them, but he didn't want to."

"Can you explain that a little more?"

"Paul knew I went with Joe Wallick for a while, but we broke up last fall. Joe saw Paul at the bus stop and asked him if he wanted to go for a ride."

"You mean Joe was driving

and there were others in the car with him. Is that right?"

Marie nodded her head. "Steve Enders and Danny Marino. They always hang around with Joe, which was one reason I got tired of going with him. Joe is, oh, he's kind of the leader, and the others follow him everywhere. I didn't like that."

"What kind of a car does Joe drive?"

"An old one. A Ford, I think. It belonged to his two older brothers, but they gave it to Joe when they joined the army a year ago."

Jack had settled onto the porch railing. He removed his hat, laid it on the railing and patted his thinning brown hair, then leaned forward so his face was close to hers. "This could be very important, Marie. Tell me a little more about Joe Wallick. What sort of person is he?"

She thought about it a moment. "Joe's all right, but he likes to act tough. You know, like some of those actors in the movies. I think he tries to imitate Cagney and Bogart and Edward G. Robinson, but he isn't very good at it. Anyway, it's mostly an act. When he wasn't playing a role he was nice, but after he got the car he started doing more and more of it. That's when I quit going out with him."

Jack stood up again, brushing off the seat of his pants.

"Can you tell me where these fellows live, Marie?"

"When we were in sixth grade at Kent School, Joe lived a few doors down, but then he moved to Adolph Street and went to a different school. I guess that's where he got to know Steve Enders and Danny Marino, but I don't know where they live."

Jack flipped his notebook shut and put it in a jacket pocket. After putting his hat on he said, "Thanks a lot, Marie. You've been a big help."

"You don't think anything will happen to Paul, do you?"

"Not a thing. Don't worry about it."

"I hope you're right. He's a nice boy, and if he was a couple of years older—" Color came to her cheeks and she smiled self-consciously. "Well, I hope you're right."

"You can bank on it, kiddo, you can bank on it."

When we were in the car again I said, "What do you think, Jack?"

"I think it's all over but the shouting, buddy."

"Why do you suppose Paul didn't put her name on the list? Talking to her twice like he did, he had to remember."

"He was being gallant. How do they say it in the movies—guh-LANT. I have an idea he knows Joe Wallick can be dangerous when he's playing one

of his roles. He didn't want him thinking Marie had fingered him, then coming around to call. Paul can be pretty dumb at times and this is one of them."

Plato Largis allowed us to talk alone with Paul. I looked over the room, wondering if it was wired for sound. Confronted with names, Paul told us the story. He barely knew Joe Wallick and Danny Marino, and only through Steve Enders. He hadn't trusted Enders since the episode at Woolworth's, was leery of Wallick, and didn't much care for Marino. Wallick's car, like dozens in town, fit the description of the one at the grocery.

Paul rationalized his secretiveness by saying, "But I don't know for sure it was them. And even if it was, you don't expect me to turn stoolie, do you?"

A scornful expression appeared on Jack Eddy's face. "That's what a lot of guys have said all the way to the chair."

Steve Enders' mother said he was visiting relatives in Wheeling. He had left on a Sunday morning train.

Joe Wallick's mother said he was out of town looking for a job. She tried to remember where, but couldn't.

Danny Marino's father didn't bother to look up from the *Liberty* magazine he was reading on the front porch. "The bum's probably boozing it up again at Al's Place on Market Street. Who cares, just so he ain't hanging around the house."

We found him alone at the end of the bar. He wasn't old enough to be there legally. Even dead drunk he was a nice looking boy, not at all the hoodlum type. It was foolish, but I couldn't help feeling guilty as I saw the look of terror on his face when he saw us approaching. Considering his condition, it surprised me he was even aware of our arrival.

"Where's Joe?" Jack said as if they were acquainted. "I've fixed it up about the car and need to talk to him."

Marino blinked a few times, then ran the back of his hand over his glazed eyes. "Jeez, I didn't recognize you at first. For a minute I thought you were cops."

Had he been sober, or even close, it wouldn't have worked. Jack was aware of that, of course. He laughed at the mention of cops, snapped his fingers at the unshaven bartender, and said, "Bring Danny boy another beer." Then, turning to the youngster again, "We don't have much time, pal. Where's Joe holed up?"

"The same place. That empty house out on Romig Road. You know it, don't you?"

"Yeah, but I wasn't sure and didn't want to waste a trip. He's got the car out there, right?"

Marino nodded. Jack slapped him lightly on the back before starting toward the front door. When we were outside, he said, "Dumb, stupid kids. Amateurs. Where's Romig Road?"

Trying to talk him into turning it over to the police was a waste of time. I suppose I knew that all along. It wouldn't have been Jack Eddy's way.

We were driving west along a dreary section of Wooster Avenue in what remained of twilight when a thought crossed my mind. "Who's your client? Did Mrs. Bauer hire the agency?"

He grinned at me. "That's confidential information."

We saw an old deserted house on a hillside soon after turning onto Romig Road. It seemed too perfect not to be the place, but even so, we checked all the way to the Barberton city limit to be certain. By the time we returned it was nearly dark. Jack hadn't said a word about what he planned to do. I don't think he knew himself.

We left the Auburn at the side of the road and walked a short distance, then climbed the hill and approached the

house through a copse of maples and cottonwoods, stumbling now and then as the fading light turned roots and rocks into innocent shadows. We were getting close when a car door slammed and Jack started running. I did too, but wouldn't have been able to keep pace even if one of those shadows hadn't sent me sprawling.

I reached the clearing as a car backed swiftly out from a ramshackle garage, its headlights silhouetting the scene in front of me. I heard Jack cry, "Hold it, Joe," and saw his dark form leap on the running board beside the driver. The car careened wildly down the incline, then suddenly swerved to one side and crashed rear-end-first into a tree. A black object I knew was Jack went tumbling to the ground. He rolled a few times, thudded against a mass of darkness that must have been a boulder, then straightened up and stumbled toward the car.

I was still twenty yards away when the driver's door opened. The glare of the headlights outlined the gun in the right hand of the man coming out. In daylight I might have seen Jack's fist cock, then strike. Instead there was a blur of movement, a dull sound of thinly-shielded bone hitting another surface much like it, the clink of metal

striking gravel, and finally the clear vision of a man falling back against the door, then sagging to the ground.

Joe Wallick wasn't out, but he was out of it. As I pulled up panting beside the car he sat shaking his head, fingers tentatively stroking his jaw. The gun was in Jack Eddy's hand.

Supper—a second one—was served at midnight in the boarding house on Dudley Street. It was a joyous affair, an occasion to remember. Paul was home again, the fatted calf prepared and awaiting his arrival. But the spotlight was on Jack Eddy, as it should have been. His scratches and bruises were dressed and cared for by Mrs. Bauer and Kitty while Mabel Klosterman and prim Miss Ferrabee oohed and aahed around them. Crusty old Bus Bauer looked on with increasing irritation. When he could take no more he said, "My God, step back there and let the man drink his beer in peace."

Sometime during the celebration Mrs. Bauer came over and gave me a hug. Quietly, so no one else could hear, she said, "None of it would have happened if it hadn't been for you, Bram. Paul might never have come home again."

I knew better. At Central Po-

lice Station I had glimpsed a roster of names on the desk of Plato Largis. Days of legwork, of detectives knocking on doors and making the rounds of repair shops and gas stations had produced a list that included the name of Joe Wallick. I wondered, though, what might have resulted if a battery of policemen had set out to bring him in. No one would ever know, thanks to Jack Eddy.

He had no client, of course. I found out later, but not from Jack, that he was able to work on the case by using a few days of the one-week vacation granted him by Wellington's National Detective Agency. The Bauers, I'm sure, always believed it was just the sort of thing a private agency went ahead and did whether someone was paying the bill or not. Jack Eddy wouldn't have told them otherwise, and I didn't.

Months later while holding Joe Wallick's gun a few days before the trial, Plato Largis said it was a miracle it had ever

fired. It was badly worn, even rusted in places, and a nub was all that remained of the firing pin. The ammunition was old, outdated, unreliable.

"By all rights it should have blown up in his face," Largis said. "There isn't enough money in the world to get me to fire this gun."

But it *had* fired. As a lark on a hot night when things got boring and a joke turned into a dare. A man was dead, a few lives devastated, others changed forever. Not because three young men were innately bad; they weren't. That altered nothing at all, of course. It didn't help.

Along with the car, the gun that killed Mike Federoff had been given to Joe Wallick when his older brothers had enlisted in the army the previous spring. There had been no good reason for them to have had it, either. Joe, like so many young fellows in 1937, had wanted to play the role of Bogart. Instead he took the part of Franchot Tone, all because they gave him a gun.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

A Matter of Form

by Margery Allingham



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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“**T**he trouble with crime today,” remarked Superintendent Stanislaus Oates seriously, “is that one almost gets too much of it, if you see what I mean.”

“Absolutely,” murmured his companion with solemn, not to say owlsh, gravity. “The word you’re searching for is ‘common,’ isn’t it?”

The two men were sitting in the far corner of the long old fashioned upstairs bar of the Café Bohème. Times had changed it since the grand gilt and red plush naughtiness of its youth, but it was still the center of the town, and as Mr. Albert Campion, who was looking a trifle thinner and grimmer in these days, glanced across its smoke-festooned expanse, it seemed to him to present a picture of the times—children in uniform and bankers in mourning.

The superintendent snorted, and his long sad face took on an even more settled expression of gloom.

“There you are,” he said. “Just because you’re overworked making yourself useful in some high and mighty hush-hush way, you think you can sneer at an old copper who has his hands full with more civil crime in every month than he used to see in a year. I hate this new ruthlessness. There used to be a time when I saw myself as a sort of sportsman cop. I’d bait my line, fling it out, and watch . . .”

“That’s right,” said Campion, echoing his philosophic tone, “and the sight of you gallantly throwing the little ones back used to bring tears to my eyes. It’s no good, guv’nor. The sentimental, kindly old sleuth stuff doesn’t become you. It’s not convincing. Fisherman my foot! You always have looked like a leathery old tomcat sitting by a hold; about as sporting and about as gentle. I can see your whiskers twitching now. Where’s the mouse this time?”

“Mouse be blowed,” objected the superintendent. “That’s a fine sleek young rat. Look at him. I wonder what he’s calling himself now?”

Campion turned his head to follow the policeman’s eyes, which, for all his kindness, were as cold and bleak as a North Sea rock.

A man stood drinking alone at the round bar not a dozen feet from them. He was in early middle age, and the superintendent’s description of him was not inapt. He was well-dressed, well-fed, and surprisingly handsome in that peculiar way which derives rather from general well-being than from any particular distinction of feature. At the moment he exuded happiness, confidence, and self-satisfaction. He drank deeply and with pleasure, and his

flushed cheeks and dancing eyes smiled back at him with affection from the mirror behind the bar. In that anxious gathering, with its underlying atmosphere of brittle excitement, his contentment was noticeable, and Superintendent Oates, for one, was irritated by it.

"Someone's lost something, I bet a shilling," he said unpardonably.

The man at the bar recognized the voice, and turned round.

"Ah," he said, revealing a deep and by no means unpleasant voice, though his accent was far too good to be true, "the dear old inspector."

"Superintendent," rebuked the policeman stolidly. "How are you, Smith? Or isn't that the name now?"

"Well, as a matter of fact it's not, oddly enough." The stranger lounged forward with elaborate confidence and stood beaming before them. "Like you, I've got promoted. The name is Rowley. Smith is so usual, don't you think? I mean anybody might be a Smith. Anthony Rowley is the new moniker, and I fancy it suits me."

"What are you doing? Wooing?" put in Campion, amused in spite of himself.

The superintendent who had never been sung to sleep either in childhood or at any other time by the tale of the famous frog, was mystified by the allusion.

"Oh, it's love, is it?" he said ungraciously. "I thought perhaps it was merely drink or an unguarded Chubb."

The man who had decided to call himself Anthony Rowley frowned.

"Vulgar, unkind, and not even accurate," he said. "Breams, not Chubbs, were my undoing. Or I theirs, of course. It depends on how you look at it. Dear me, I am inebriated, aren't I?"

"You are." The superintendent's tone was dangerously avuncular. "And if you can get such indecent happiness out of a double or two in these days, you have my profound respect."

A fleeting glimmer of caution hovered in Mr. Rowley's bright blue eyes, but his unnatural elation killed it all too soon.

"Well, as a matter of fact," he repeated perilously, "as a matter of fact, and not because you're a policeman, but because you're a dear old gentleman and I like you, as a matter of fact my glorious condition at this moment is caused neither by love nor alcohol, but by something very much better than either."

The superintendent's heavy eyelids flickered.

"I'll buy it," he said.

Rowley laughed and winked at Campion.

"Isn't he an old duck?" he said. "A dear harmless, friendly old duck. He's taken a fancy to me and he just wants to know why I'm so happy."

"That'll do, my lad. Not too much impudence, if I were you." In spite of the protest, Oates still maintained his unnatural docility.

Rowley turned away. "You almost break my heart," he said over his shoulder. "You almost spoil my celebration." The final word appeared to attract him, for he repeated it and suddenly wheeled round again. "I'll tell you," he said. "Do you know why I've been treating myself like a long-lost son all the afternoon? Do you know why I keep giving myself little drinks and jolly encouraging smiles in the mirror?"

"I'd make a darned good guess." Oates's earlier humor showed signs of returning. "Either you've just made an ungodly fool of yourself again or you're just going to."

"Wrong," said Anthony Rowley triumphantly. "Wrong. Prosai-cally wrong. Your mind leaps to material facts as usual. You wouldn't understand, so I shan't give you the whole lowdown, but because you're an old acquaintance I'll let you in halfway. I'm gloriously happy because I have had a beautiful thought. This will be lost on you because, dear good chap though you are, you're not the sort of man who has really beautiful thoughts. Don't take offense and don't worry about it. You can't help it; you're just not that sort of person. You understand that, don't you, sir?"

His final remark was addressed to Campion, who made no attempt to hide his smile.

"A beautiful thought," Rowley repeated. "A peach. A delicate masterpiece of exquisite construction. An epic gem. Or, if you prefer it, a fizzler. Excuse me, I must go and brood over it again."

He drifted away, only a trifle uncertainly, and Oates looked after him with a dour and introspective eye.

"He'll never forgive himself when he sobers up, will he?" he said presently, and for the first time that afternoon a brief, satisfied smile passed over his face. "Poor chap, I'm almost sorry for him. That's my sporting instinct again. So he's on to something, is he? I'll get the lads to look him up at once."

Campion's pale eyes behind his horn-rimmed spectacles were kindly.

"I wonder what it was," he remarked. "He seemed delighted."

"He seemed tight," corrected Oates dryly. "He was a very different chap last time I saw him. Not nearly so chatty, believe me."

He belongs to the type of crook I've no patience with at all. He's not even very good at his job. You heard him admit it just now. Damn it, he's almost proud of his incompetence. Bream safes, that's his line. No one else's safes, mark you; just Bream's. He served an apprenticeship with the firm when he was young, learnt just as much as he needed to know and no more, and now no Bream safe is proof against him.

"They say the modern crook has to be a specialist," he added, "but that lad overdoes it. It's rank incompetence in his case, and he's lazy. He gets on my nerves."

"I think you're unreasonable." Campion made the criticism mildly. "A man with a trade mark like that must play right into your hands."

"Ye-es. So he does." Oates was strangely reluctant. "So he does," he repeated. "In a way. Yet he's slippery. Once or twice he's pulled a very fast one and we haven't been able to collect sufficient evidence to prosecute. We've known he was our man, and we've brought him in, and then he's wriggled out again."

"Infuriating chap," murmured Campion. "He had more brains than the average, I thought."

The superintendent got up.

"That's half his trouble," he said heavily. "He doesn't use 'em, or doesn't use 'em all. However, he's done it this time. He's opened his heart to the wrong man. That's why I think I'll just get back for half an hour or so. After all, when the mouse puts his head out of the hole, it's silly not to pounce. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," Mr. Campion was polite but tickled. "Our delinquents must be taught to be efficient at all costs."

Left to himself, it occurred to Campion that he might as well take a little food, and with this in mind he went downstairs to the restaurant.

The big ugly room was full, as usual, with a fair sprinkling of people present whom nearly everybody else knew at least by sight. He nodded to young Lafcadio, the painter, avoided Mrs. Beamish, waved to Lily O'Dell, and was just settling down to half a dozen oysters when he caught sight of young Green.

Brian Green, whom Campion had last seen at the Oxford and Cambridge match, was in the uniform of a private in His Majesty's Territorial Army, and he was alone. He was also visibly depressed, but on meeting Campion's eye, he brightened a little and came lumbering over, six foot three of yellow-haired good temper.

"Not so hot," he answered in reply to the inevitable question.

"I'm on the lights, you know, down in the country. This is the first day of leave."

"Sounds all right to me," said Campion, waving him into the chair opposite. "Why the lonely state? Hasn't she turned up?"

Brian's smile vanished once more.

"Well, yes," he began awkwardly as he dug a small pattern on the tablecloth with a fork. "She came all right but—er—well, she's gone."

There was a brief silence between them, since Campion could not think of any comment which could possibly be considered helpful. The boy's depression increased.

"You're so tied, aren't you?" he observed at last. "When you're in the army, I mean, you can't be on the spot." There was a wistfulness on his good-natured freckled face which made his host feel suddenly old. "Of course," he continued seriously, "she's very young."

Mr. Campion checked the impulse to inquire if the woman was out of the cradle, and did his best to look intelligently indulgent.

"I thought she would rather like the uniform," the boy added naively, "but apparently she's got bitten by the ministry idea."

"The ministry? What ministry?"

"Oh, I don't know. She did tell me. Some awfully important ministry, she said. Apparently all the intellectual lads have crowded into Supply and Defense and Economic and whatnot—at least that's her idea—and that's what's taken her fancy at the moment. It sounded too like the post office to me, and I told her so. She didn't like that. She's known me so long, you see, that she hasn't any illusions about my brain power. Anyway, that was why she couldn't go on to a show with me tonight. She had a date with one of these intelligent lads."

"She'll grow out of that," said Campion with conviction.

"Do you think so?" Brian was pathetically eager. "We've been running around together ever since we were at school. She's a wonderful girl. Dances like a dream. We used to get on marvelously before she got interested in brains."

"My dear chap, they recover from that. It falls from them like a cloak." Campion spoke with great earnestness. "Meanwhile, if you'll allow me to prescribe for the evening, food."

"Food? Do you think so? I rather thought . . ."

"Food," insisted his host. "As from one who knows. Vast quantities of beautiful food. Wait a moment, we'll consult George."

Three days later Campion met Brian again. To be exact, it was

not so much a meeting as an ambush. He came hurrying into his own flat with a brief couple of hours in which to get through a month's correspondence, only to discover two young people sitting in suspiciously nonchalant attitudes, one on either end of his settee. The girl had been crying, and there was a damp patch on Brian's khaki shoulder. The soldier got up.

"Oh, there you are," he said with relief. "I do hope you'll forgive us barging in on you like this, but you were the only person I could think of to come to in the circumstances. By the way, this is Susan. Miss Susan Chad; Mr. Campion."

Susan was a dear. As soon as Campion set eyes upon her he forgave Brian much of his youth and understood many of his problems. Changing fashions produce changing women, and years of progress and emancipation are thought to have altered the sex unrecognizably, but there is one type of girl who never differs. In tiger skins, crinolines, or A.T.S. uniform she remains herself, dear, desirable, and chuckle-headed as a coot.

Susan raised a small round face to Mr. Campion's own with a sweet dignity which had forgotten to take into account the teardrop on the edge of her cheekbone, and said with devastating humility:

"I've been so frightfully silly and just a little tiny bit dishonest. What would you advise?"

"If you could convince her it won't mean the Tower it would be something," muttered Brian out of the corner of his mouth.

"The hopeless thing about it is that it wasn't really my fault," the girl protested. "It wouldn't be so bad, somehow, if I'd done anything. It was the man in the station cloakroom. I didn't even look, or at least hardly."

"I blame the fellow for saddling you with the responsibility in the first place," said Brian stolidly. "That was an unheard-of imposition."

"No, Brian. You mustn't say that." Susan was very serious. "No, you can't blame him. I wanted the responsibility, and I was very honored by his confidence. That's why this is so absolutely awful. I simply daren't face him. I'd rather die."

"It's a code," said Campion, who had been listening for some time with his head on one side. "My bet is that it's a code. You've lost the secret password and the figures don't add up."

The girl blinked at him reproachfully.

"I don't know what it is," she said. "I haven't been so indiscreet as to look. It's all those seals which are going to cause the trouble."

"Seals?" muttered Campion, taken off his guard. "I give in. Men-

tion a couple of whales and I fly screaming from the room."

Brian smiled apologetically at Susan before he eyed his host sternly.

"Perhaps we'd better explain," he suggested.

"Perhaps you had," agreed Campion huffily. "What's up?"

"I'll tell it, Brian," the girl put in firmly. "There's one side of it that you don't see, and that's the part which matters rather a lot from my point of view. Mr. Campion, I admire Tony tremendously, and that makes all the difference, doesn't it?"

"Oh, indubitably," said Campion, allowing the fog to close over his head. "Let's start from there."

"I'd like to," Susan was still quiet. "Tony is in a frightfully important ministry, Consolidation of Defense, I think; I can't quite remember. But anyway, he's way up in it, and he's terribly responsible and utterly overworked. Last time I saw him we were going to a show, but he was suddenly called out of town on something he couldn't tell me about, and we had to dash back to his place and collect some things. It was all desperately urgent and, as he didn't know when he would be back, he gave me a small attaché case containing some very secret papers and made me promise to take care of it for him. I swore I would, of course, and he left me on my doorstep with the case."

"Of very secret papers," echoed Mr. Campion stupidly.

"That's what he said, anyway," she protested. "Only, of course, it was more impressive than I've made it. I—I'm not impressive."

"My dear girl, forgive me." Mr. Campion was contrite instantly. "I was only assimilating the facts. I'm not too bright this afternoon. He gave you an attaché case to mind and you've lost it. Is that right?"

"Oh, no," Susan grew crimson at the suggestion. "No, I've not lost it, thank heaven. It's not as bad as that."

"Here, let me tell it." Brian came forward protectively. "Susan isn't quite the little wet she sounds. She believes in this chap, you see, and evidently he realizes the sort of kid she is, absolutely dependable, and thoroughly first class. Anyway, he wanted to leave this attaché case in perfectly safe hands for a day or so. It was late at night, on that same evening when I met you, as a matter of fact, and there was no chance of shoving it in a bank or in his office, so he gave it to Susan." He hesitated and blushed. "You may think that unlikely," he went on stoutly, "but I don't, knowing Susan."

Campion accepted the rebuke meekly.

"Oh, rather not," he said with what he trusted was convincing

enthusiasm. "That's as far as I've got. Where does the seal come in?"

"It was the seal which got broken. That's the trouble," murmured Susan. "The cloakroom man did it—or rather he stood over me while I did it. It was too impossibly awkward. Tell him, Brian."

The young soldier sat down on the arm of the settee.

"It's a perfectly simple story," he said. "Susan kept the case that night and most of the next day, but then she got the wind up, as anyone might. You know how you keep shifting something terribly important. Wherever you put it, it never feels quite safe. Finally it got on her nerves, as it would on anybody's, and so, very reasonably, she thought she'd stick it in a station cloakroom. Well, that was all right, but she'd forgotten the I.R.A. scares and the new regulations at some of the stations, and when she got down to Waterloo or wherever it was, the fellow in the office asked her to open the thing. She objected rather guiltily and that made him awkward. You know how these things happen. Finally there was a bit of a row and people started to collect."

Susan looked at Mr. Campion appealingly. "I didn't dare to hurry away with it. It would have looked so suspicious. It was terrible," she said earnestly.

"I can well imagine it," he agreed. "So you opened it, of course? Bursting the lock, no doubt. What did you find inside?"

"A package," cut in Brian. "This is the difficult part. There was a squarish package inside simply plastered all over with official seals. Frankly, the long and the short of it was that Susan had to break these. When the fellow saw that there was only a great wedge of forms and things inside he apologized, but that didn't help. For nearly two days Susan has been in agony waiting for this chap to turn up. When he does she'll have to explain, and she's afraid that he may get in a frightful row since the seals are broken. It's a jam, isn't it?"

"Jam indeed," consented Mr. Campion cautiously. "Er—if it isn't a foolish question, what exactly to you expect me to do?"

Susan looked at Brian, who had the grace to hesitate.

"It was I who thought of you," he said at last. "Susan came to me because she—well, she regards me as a sort of brother, so she says." He was blushing furiously, and Campion admired his chivalry. "We thought that if the seals could be somehow . . . replaced, I don't know how or who by, but . . . well, you're mixed up with all sorts of authorities, aren't you?" His voice trailed away and his shoulders drooped dejectedly.

"It was a wild idea," he muttered apologetically.

Campion had not the heart to agree with him as profoundly as he felt.

"Where is this incriminating bundle now?" he inquired.

Susan fished under the sofa on which she sat.

"I haven't dared to let it out of my sight since then," she said pathetically. "I wish I'd never seen it. I used to think I'd be pretty good at this sort of thing, responsibility and secrets and all that, but I'm not. I'm bad. I'm hopeless, I'd never take it on again."

In the face of this humility, any criticism which Mr. Campion might have felt inclined to offer was stifled at birth. He took the small attaché case with becoming reverence and raised the lid. The package with the broken seals lay before him.

To do it justice, it was an impressive parcel with quite two pennyworth of red sealing wax plastered about it and a length of green tape as binding. As he stood holding it in his hands, with the eyes of the two young people upon him, inspiration came to him as if from some psychometric source.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "and in strictest confidence, of course, what is Tony's name? I'm afraid you'll have to tell me that."

"Of course. I don't think that matters. You may even have heard of him." Susan spoke with a pride which seemed a little hard on Brian. "He's Anthony Rowley. *The Anthony Rowley*," she added hopefully.

Mr. Campion saved the parcel and his equanimity with an effort, and the girl who was watching him caught her breath.

"You *have* heard of him," she said. "Then you will do all you can for me, won't you?"

Campion set down the package. "All I may," he said seriously. "Tell me, did Mr. Rowley put these seals on this himself?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so." The idea was a new one to Susan, and she looked a little bewildered. "He might have, of course," she added presently. "He was away some time when he went up to the study to fetch it. That's an official seal though, isn't it?"

Campion studied one of the blobs of wax. There was certainly the imprint of a lion and a crown upon it, but many medallions bear this device, certain sixpenny pieces amongst them. He glanced up. "All this happened on Tuesday, did it?" he said. "On the evening I met Brian?"

"Yes. That's why it's so frightfully urgent. Tony may come back any time now. It's going to be unbearable. I'd rather die than have to tell him."

Brian put an arm round her shoulders.

"Trust Campion," he said. "It's quite possible that he knows some important bug who will take a personal interest in the whole case, Rowley and all. Can you think of anyone like that, guv'nor?"

Campion ran an easing finger round the inside of his collar.

"Someone does come to mind," he admitted. "To deny that would be wrong. Yes, definitely, someone very important does come to mind."

Forty minutes later Mr. Campion and Superintendent Oates sat looking at each other across the desk in the policeman's solid, old fashioned office. The attaché case lay open between them, and a pile of buff-colored forms which had been in the sealed package now rested on the superintendent's blotter. Oates, never an emotional man, was wiping his eyes.

"You can find the girl whenever you want her, can you?" he inquired when he could trust his voice.

"Oh, yes. She's being given ice cream and faithful affection by the long-suffering Brian. They're waiting for me to do a spot of philanthropic lese-majesty, bless them. What are you going to do?"

The superintendent placed a pair of shabby pince-nez across his nose, and picked up one of the forms. He read it again until his feelings choked him.

"We'll have to have 'em both up together," he decided. "When I've got word that we've pulled the man in, you fetch the girl."

"No mental cruelty," warned Campion hastily. "I don't know if I want to be a party to this at all."

Oates blew his nose. "The party is mine," he said dryly. "Don't worry about the girl. I shall treat her as if she were my own daughter . . . exactly, the wretched little imbecile."

Leaning forward, he pressed the buzzer on his desk.

He was in much the same mood a little after eight that evening when a sober, but still mercurial, Mr. Gilbert Smith, alias Anthony Rowley, sat in the visitor's chair regarding him with the bland affability of one who feels completely at ease.

"Don't apologize," murmured Mr. Rowley when he felt that the silence had gone on long enough. "I don't mind coming along to see you, even at this impossible hour. I told your Watch Committee in the bowler hats that I should only be too pleased to come with them to look you up. I like you. Nice little place you have here."

Superintendent Oates glanced at Mr. Campion, who sat in a corner on the other side of the room. It was a quiet, satisfied glance, the glance of one who savors a delicate wine before tasting.

"It's nice to see your friend, too," added Mr. Rowley with increasing geniality. "It's pleasant to find you in such—forgive me—but such unexpectedly intelligent company. You may not believe it, but I find an evening like this very jolly. I am a man of few acquaintances and there's nothing I like better than a chat."

"You surprise me," said Oates with heavy politeness. "I should have thought you'd have had quite a busy life up at the Ministry. Let me see, you're in the Registration of Office Premises Department, aren't you?"

It was a hit. A shade, fleeting as a cloud shadow in a high wind, passed over Mr. Rowley's sleek and smiling countenance. His eyes wavered for an instant. However, when he spoke his voice was perfectly controlled.

"What a pity," he said. "What a frightful pity. You're confusing me with somebody else. I thought this was a personal call. I'm disappointed."

"Are you? Not nearly as much as you're going to be, believe me. I've got a form here, quite a number of 'em, in fact. Perhaps I'd better read one to you."

He took a flimsy buff-colored sheet from the pile before him.

"This is a masterpiece in a small way," he began condescendingly. "Anyway, it has all the incomprehensibility and stultifying dullness of the genuine product. The printing is minute, and I doubt if many people would take the trouble to wade through it. I see the address is 'Controller, BQ/FT/359 (A) 43, Whitehall,' but that has been struck out and '25 Calligan Way, Wembley,' printed in. You've been evacuated, I suppose?"

"I don't quite follow you," murmured Mr. Rowley politely.

"No? Well, we'll come to that later," said Oates inexorably. "*'Dear Sir,—In compliance with the recent Order in Council, No. 5013287, Sec. 2 AB et seq., you are required to complete the following details concerning the office premises now occupied by you. As you are doubtless aware, it has become important for police and the other interested authorities to possess certain necessary information concerning office premises in vulnerable areas, in order that proper protection for goods and valuables may be ensured in all eventualities.'*"

He paused and looked over his glasses at the expressionless face before him.

"Bewilderingly ingenious," he said. "If there was an Order in Council No. 5013287 it would be even better."

Mr. Rowley yawned. "I find it tedious," he said frankly.

"I don't," said Oates. "It made me laugh. When I first read it I laughed till the tears ran down my face. It's the ultimate labor-saving device of all time. The preliminary questions are magnificently simple. *Full Name of Occupier of Office. Address. Nature of Business. Number of Staff employed. Whether Night Watchman employed.*' I liked that. That delighted me. But toward the end it gets even better. After *'Number of floors, Number of rooms, Whether all rooms are accessible to a Fire Escape, How many doors between main staircase and each room, if said doors are locked and if so what locks are used,'* we come to the fascinating question of safes. That is Sub-section C.4 B/F, I notice. Let me read you the headings. *'In which room is your safe? State type (wall or box, etc.). State make of safe. State number of safe. State approximate date when safe was fitted. State approximate size of safe over all.'* And finally, the ultimate pitch of consummate impudence, *'Are you in the habit of leaving valuables in safe overnight?'*"

Anthony Rowley shrugged his plump shoulders.

"I'm afraid I can't follow all that government stuff," he said. "The only thing to do with an official form is to fill it in, not to try to understand it."

"Exactly." Oates was triumphant. "That's the general view. That's the fine fat-headed affectation adopted by half the great British public. That's why a pernicious document of this sort is so dangerous. The man who composed this banked on the astounding fact that the chances are that a man who has spent a small fortune on protecting his property would yet direct his secretary to complete anything of this type without hesitation, so long as it was printed on cheap buff paper and arrived in an official envelope."

"Very instructive," agreed Mr. Anthony Rowley languidly, "and to a psychologist probably entertaining, but I don't see the point of it myself."

"Don't you?" said Oates. "That's odd, because a number of these forms which I have here have already been filled in. They all come from smallish busy City firms, I notice; each one of them clearly a carefully chosen victim of the enterprising person who persuaded some small crook printer to set up the document. I should have thought you'd have been very interested."

"Me? My dear fellow, why me?"

The superintendent appeared to appreciate the performance, for a brief smile passed over his grey face as he took a small sheaf of the buff slips from the blotter.

"These are the forms which have been completed," he observed.

"The rest are blanks. Do you know, it looks to me almost as though someone had been in a hurry, not to say in a funk, and has hastily collected everything connected with the Registration of Office Premises Department and packed it into a parcel for safety, after which he probably gave the parcel to some trustworthy and innocent person, some person who would never be suspected by the police, until his own premises should be safe from their attentions. I can imagine a man doing that on sobering up and remembering that he had opened his mouth far too wide when in conversation with a superintendent of police. Still, we'll let that pass. The interesting thing is that out of the twenty-seven forms which various misguided members of the public have been pleased to complete, nineteen have been scored across with blue pencil. The eight which remain have *one thing in common*."

"Really?" Rowley still kept up his polite indifference. "And what is that?"

"They each record that the firm in question possesses a Bream safe, together with every conceivable detail concerning it." Oates made the announcement quietly, but all trace of his earlier sprightliness had vanished and his eyes were cold. "As you were so kind as to tell me," he added, "it was a very beautiful idea, but unfortunately it didn't wash."

There was a long pause, during which Mr. Rowley looked thoughtfully into the future. Presently he smiled.

"You're so ingenious," he said. "I've been working out your theory, and it's been an education to me. Now I know why ever since last Tuesday your troop of Boy Scouts have been paying me such a lot of attention. They've taken a very thorough look at my flat, and they've escorted me wherever I've gone with touching fidelity. Naturally, they've been disappointed to find me living in blameless and rather boring innocence. I can understand your zeal and their exasperation. But weren't you taking a little too much for granted? My dear chap, you know as well as I do that you can't hope to pin those forms on me simply because eight of them refer to Bream safes."

Oates did not answer him. Instead he glanced under his eyelashes at Mr. Campion.

"I wonder if I could trouble you to ask little Miss Susan Chad to step in here, my dear boy?" he murmured with the fine display of old-world courtesy abominably overdone which he was apt to adopt at particularly enjoyable moments in his career.

Campion experienced a sneaking sympathy for Anthony Rowley.

Just for an instant he saw the whites of the man's eyes.

"She's something of a fan of yours, I gather," Oates observed mercilessly.

"Is she? Rare and intelligent woman," murmured his visitor cautiously. "The name is new to me. I shall enjoy meeting her."

When Campion returned with Susan clinging nervously to his arm he found himself hoping, most improperly, that she would live up to the testimonial. Oates rose at her approach and so did his visitor, who turned to meet her squarely.

Had Susan been an experienced accomplice, one glance at his blank, inquiring face would have given her the clue she needed. Unfortunately, at any rate from Mr. Rowley's point of view, Susan was hardly experienced in anything and her immediate reaction was disastrous.

"Oh, Tony," she burst out eagerly, "when did you get back?"

He did not respond at once, and she glanced down the room, catching sight of the attaché case on the superintendent's desk. A wave of color spread over her face and she turned back to the man impulsively.

"Oh, have I got you in a frightful row by breaking the seals? I'm desperately sorry. I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds, but I couldn't help it. Honestly, Tony. I couldn't help it."

She turned to Oates.

"Does it matter so frightfully? Nothing has been stolen, you see. The whole package is just exactly as he gave it to me. Everything is there."

Mr. Campion always held it to Mr. Rowley's credit that in that moment of ruin he laughed.

"So true, my dear," he said suddenly, holding out his hands to her. "As you say, nothing has been stolen. That ought to make a lot of difference."

Oates sighed with satisfaction. "Then you admit . . . ?" he began.

"Wait a moment." The man who called himself Anthony Rowley released Susan's hands, smiled at her faintly with an odd mixture of apology and regret, and wandered over towards the desk. "I should like to make a brief statement," he said.

Oates leant back in his chair.

"Oh, you would, would you?" he said. "You've got a nerve."

The crook shrugged his shoulders.

"I should like to make a statement," he repeated.

In the circumstances there was nothing else for it, of course, and Oates gave way ungraciously.

"We'll hear it first and take the shorthand note afterwards," he said. "Fire away."

Mr. Rowley walked away from Susan, who had planted herself beside him.

"It's a sordid little tale of vulgar vanity," he began. "I met Miss Chad, who lives in a rather different circle from my own, about a fortnight ago, and in order to ingratiate myself with her I regret to have to say that I represented myself as having some sort of important government post."

"Tony!"

Susan's voice was small and horrified. He glanced at her briefly.

"I'm sorry, Beautiful," he said, "but this is a police station, and when in the hands of the law the truth has a nasty way of being the only touchstone."

"Yes?" inquired Oates grimly. "And so what?"

"So nothing," continued Mr. Rowley firmly. "Nothing of importance, that is, save that she believed me. I acquired quite a lot of fake prestige from this subterfuge. It went down very much better than the true story of my activities, which as you know are not very glorious, would have done. After all, an out-of-work motor car salesman twice convicted for burglary is not the romantic figure that a budding diplomat, I might almost say a blooming diplomat, appears."

"Tony," said Susan again, and this time he did not look at her.

"All went well," he continued clearly, "until—er—chance took a hand. On Monday evening I took a cab in the vicinity of Westminster, and in it I found a large manila envelope, left, no doubt, by a previous fare. In the envelope were these forms in which you are so interested. Quite frankly I didn't bother to read them. I hate small print, and anyway I can hardly read, you know. I merely saw that they looked official, so I hit on the idea of packing them into a distinguished-looking parcel and giving them to Miss Susan to mind. I'm afraid I misjudged her. I took it for granted that feminine curiosity would be too much for her and that she would be bound to open the package, thereby receiving ocular proof that I was the important person I had set myself up to be. What I did not realize was that she would be so conscientious as to take the whole matter to the authorities."

"Tony, if this is true, I'll never speak to you again," Susan was pale with rage and humiliation.

"If it isn't true, which seems more than probable, you'll hardly have the opportunity," murmured the superintendent.

Mr. Rowley sat down.

"How embarrassing one's more childish follies always are," he remarked. "Truth is so naked, isn't it?"

"Tony, you're making this up. It doesn't sound like you. Tell me you're making it up." Susan went over to him as she spoke and, since he could not avoid her, he smiled into her face, albeit a trifle wryly.

"Life is full of vulgarity, my dear," he said. "Let this be an awful warning. One swallow doesn't make a summer and one portfolio, alas! doesn't make a cabinet minister."

Susan gaped at him for a moment, and then disgraced herself.

"Oh, I hate you," she said indistinctly. "I think you're the meanest, most revolting little tick who ever lived. I never never want to see you again."

Oates glanced anxiously at Mr. Campion, who led her gently from the room. Mr. Rowley remained where he was, blinking at the superintendent, who leant across the desk.

"I suppose you think you've been very clever?" he demanded.

"No. Prudent," said Mr. Rowley. "Prudent, and, in my own way, almost a gentleman."

"Prudent be damned!" exploded the superintendent unpardonably. "If you think I'm going to believe any cock and bull story about you finding these things in a taxicab, you're mad."

Mr. Rowley permitted a brief smile to break through the somewhat unexpected expression of resignation which had settled on his face.

"You misjudge me," he said. "It's not what I expect you to believe, is it? It's what I know you can prove. Did you send anyone down to the address printed on the form?"

Oates did not answer. The chit from a plain clothes sergeant reporting briefly "Accommodation Address: Wise Guy in charge: no change to be got there in a million years" lay open on the desk before him.

Mr. Rowley got up.

"I shall be hearing from you, no doubt," he said gently, "if it's only to pass the time of day. Meanwhile you'll want to confer with your legal advisers, won't you? I should like to congratulate you on that ingenious theory you put forward, but you see the facts were far more simple and far more degradingly human. The wiliest of us do silly things to impress a woman."

Oates laughed briefly.

"The wiliest of us don't escape every time," he said bitterly. "You wait, my lad."

"Oh, I shall," Mr. Rowley assured him. "You know my address."

Mr. Campion stood on the pavement looking for a cab which carried Brian and Susan out into the darkness. Having witnessed the grateful eagerness with which Susan had accepted his sheltering arm, Campion was inclined to bet that the young warrior's last day of leave was liable to prove more satisfactory than his first.

He was just turning back to have a word with Oates when another figure loomed up out of the dark gateway. It was Mr. Rowley, and he came up to Campion in the moonlight.

"You were with Oates at the café that night," he said. "Tell me, did I call him an old duck, by any chance?"

"Er—yes. Yes, I think you did."

"Fool," said Mr. Rowley. "Fool. I'm always doing it. It's bad luck. It's prophetic. The association of ideas. See what I mean?"

"No, I—I can't say I do, exactly."

"Why, the rhyme," said the man excitedly. "Don't you remember the rhyme? It was the 'fine fat duck who gobbled him up,' wasn't it? Fancy calling a superintendent of police a duck, anyway."

"Oh," said Mr. Campion as the light broke in upon him. "The frog, you mean?"

The other sighed.

"The frog who would a-wooing go," he murmured. "Ah, well, but such a nice girl. Such a very nice girl and such a beautiful thought."

They stood looking down the dark road.

"Heigh ho," said Anthony Rowley.

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MAGDALEN NABB

Salvatore (Salva) Guarnaccia, a marshall in the *carabinieri* based at Palazzo Pitti in Florence, Italy, is Sicilian-born. He wears sunglasses in all but the darkest places or most inclement weather because his slightly bulging eyes are allergic to sunshine and, on those occasions when he forgets his glasses, he looks like he is crying. He is often described as ponderous, of a menacing bulk, burly, large and fat. When he sits, he places his big hands on his knees. His expressionless face does not disclose what he is thinking. He often sighs deeply but he never says very much (a problem, according to Captain Maestran-gelo), and is often accused of

being asleep on his feet (by his wife and by the energetic and cheerful Roman, Marshall Niccolini).

In the first few books of the series, his wife and two boys were in Syracuse, where she was caring for her ailing mother, and he was living in Florence, looking forward to their occasional visits. We meet her for the first time in *The Marshall and the Murderer* (Scribners, 1987; Penguin, 1988), but we have yet to meet the two sons.

Once Guarnaccia starts, he pursues his quarry doggedly until he has tracked him down, even if it takes years. He "notices" things. Images fix in his mind which "float" around while he gets "feelings" which are in-

variably accurate, although he could not begin to tell you why or where he gets these insights. He considers himself stupid.

Marshall Guarnaccia is the creation of Magdalen Nabb, who has lived in Florence since 1975. There are currently six books in the series. *Death of an Englishman* (Scribners, 1982; Penguin, 1984) takes place at Christmastime. Guarnaccia has the flu and he is scheduled to go home to Syracuse for Christmas. But a dead Englishman is found in a small, dirty, antique-filled (are they stolen?) apartment near the Pitti Palace. So, in the company of Captain Maestrangelo, who is irritated by Guarnaccia but who realizes that without him the case could not be solved, he must ponderously overcome the symptoms of the flu and the fear that he will never get to Syracuse in time for Christmas in order to concentrate on the case. In this story, we learn about the theft and export of the national treasures of Italy.

In *Death of a Dutchman* (Scribners, 1983; Penguin, 1984), a Dutch jeweler is found dying in July of the following year. The marshall discovers the dying man as he is visiting an elderly recluse in his area. Tourism and the hot summer weather play a big role in the setting of this mystery. *Death in Springtime* (Scribners, 1984;

Penguin, 1985) takes place in March of the year following; it's snowing when two women, one American, are kidnapped right in front of the marshall's eyes. In this story, Guarnaccia ventures out of Florence into the Tuscan hills to deal with Sardinian terrorists.

In *Death in Autumn* (Scribners, 1985; Penguin, 1986), bodies are found in two seemingly unrelated cases—a foreign woman is found in a river, clad only in a fur coat and lots of jewelry, and a boy is found dead from a drug overdose. In this story, we make the rounds of the Florentine hotels, seeing the tourists' life style through the eyes of the marshall. *The Marshall and the Murderer* occurs at Christmastime again; a Swiss girl, an art student and potter, is reported missing by her friend and fellow student. Later, she is found dead in a sherd pile at a terra cotta pottery. In this book we explore the pottery "villages" on the outskirts of Florence, an area the author knows well, since she was a potter before she took up writing full time.

The latest book in the series is *The Marshall and the Madwoman* (Scribners, 1988). It is a hot August, during the summer holidays. Guarnaccia and his wife are in Florence—he is on duty and she is trying to find shops that are open. Both dis-

cover an isolated little neighborhood, almost like a village within the city limits. Guarnaccia gets to know some of the locals, and when a "madwoman" jumps, or is pushed, from her window, he feels compelled to investigate. Little is known about her—no one seems to know her full name or her history or how she can afford to live in that neighborhood. Guarnaccia travels to a mental hospital where the woman spent a number of years and traces her life back to the famous Florentine floods before he uncovers the motive behind what turns out to be murder. All of this is made even more interesting by the fact that the marshall, as a Sicilian, has been unaware of the effect the flood had on Florence and the Florentines. Had he been more familiar with recent Florentine history, he might have solved the mystery of the madwoman's death sooner.

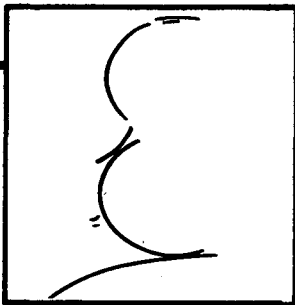
In addition to Captain Maestrangelo (who appears in key roles in *Death in Springtime* and *Death in Autumn*), Brigadier Lorenzini is a regular in this series. Other young men,

doing their national service, come and go, each with their idiosyncrasies and affectations. We also meet several prosecutors, most of whom have little regard for the marshall and officers from other jurisdictions like Marshall Niccolini, who runs the station in the pottery village. The series concentrates on Guarnaccia, however; these are not police-station procedurals like John Creasey's Commander George Gideon or Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series but are focused on the character of the principal investigator. We learn as much about the marshall in them as we do about the mysteries he is investigating.

The setting is uniquely Florentine. In fact, Florence is as much a character in the series as Guarnaccia. The rich detail of the marshall's life and his observations (both as an officer of the law and as an outsider) of everyday life and death in Florence make this series a must for those who are interested in mysteries set in Italy. And if the reader is a devotee of the police procedural the series is highly recommended.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



In its ads, *Dead Calm* is called a "suspense thriller." And this taut production manages to fill that bill for much of the time. The film's start even appears to be an *hommage* to Hitchcock—showing a train, one of the master's favorite vehicles, and its passengers disembarking at a grand station. Australian director Phillip Noyce continues his opening tribute with a Hitchcock-like, slow sweeping shot, circling the center of focus—in this case navy officer John Ingram (Sam Neill), just home on leave.

Ingram and his wife Rae (Nicole Kidman) have been struck by tragedy. Their baby son has been killed in an auto accident. To heal their wound, the couple set forth on a long, quiet cruise on their spiffy sailing yacht. The two lose track of the days, each more beautiful

than the last. With water as smooth a plate of glass and picture-perfect sunsets, it's a lovely trip.

Until their idyllic retreat is interrupted by a mysterious stranger, madly rowing a dinghy toward them from a schooner in the distance. When the stranger boards the yacht, he runs below deck and cowers in a corner like a frightened animal. Hughie Warriner (Billy Zane) tells them that what began as a pleasure cruise toward Fiji ended in horror when his six friends died—of food poisoning he says. And his ship, the *Orpheus*, is taking on water after encountering a storm.

John, however, is skeptical. When his strange new passenger falls asleep, he locks him below, warns Rae not to let him out, and rows to the *Orpheus*. Hughie wakes up and starts yelling and banging on the door

to get out. John, meanwhile, is at the other ship, poking around. When Hughie does get out, he overpowers Rae and takes control of the boat, pointing it in the other direction, full speed.

The tension builds, full throttle, with husband and wife trying to get back together and Hughie growing more and more terrifying. One moment he may be dancing on deck to a tape of "low production garage music," as he puts it. The next he may be grabbing Rae by the hair and slamming her to the floor. The scenes from their boat alternate with scenes of John on an increasingly spooky and dangerous schooner, where he has discovered the gruesome corpses of the crew.

It wouldn't be giving away too much to say that John and Rae eventually are reunited—it's obvious to the moviegoer that they will be, after much trial. *Dead Calm* has no complex plot, with twists and turns, but is rather an appeal to emotion.

In a film with only three characters, the cast must make

it swim or sink. This trio keeps it above water. Billy Zane plays the off-center stranger with zest, in a role that runs from California hippie-type to raging lunatic. Nicole Kidman would be a welcome addition on any man's cruise. She is able to show tenderness one moment and toughness the next. Sam Neill, whose character also lost a child in *A Cry in the Dark*, again looks like the everyman who has been hit by trouble.

But for a couple of key scenes, the film is an edge-of-the-seat thriller. One shows the auto accident, for which, even though the audience knows what will happen, tension is built along the way. Unfortunately, the filmmaker decides to show the baby flying through the car's windshield—a gratuitously violent shot.

The ending of *Dead Calm* is its major fault. It doesn't produce a sigh of relief; instead, one comes away disappointed that the final note resembles a run-of-the-mill teenage horror flick more than a top-notch Hitchcock-like thriller.

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EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF by Art Cosing

John waited nervously for the next subway. He noted that the platform was deserted except for the two ugly teenagers. Both youths were dressed alike: torn jeans and black leather jackets with shiny metal studs. Unlit cigarettes dangled from their lips.

I'm going to get mugged, thought John. I'm going to lose my paycheck and the week's rent.

"Gotta match, buddy?" asked the first teenager.

"I don't smoke," John said.

"Gotta wallet, buddy?" asked the second teenager.

It was over in less than a minute. The larger of the two threw his arm around John's neck. The second leather jacket drove an elbow into John's chest, knocking him to the ground. Then there were four hands ripping at his pants. The wallet came free, and they were gone. Up the stairs and out onto the street.

John sat stunned for an instant, rubbing his bruised chest. All he could think about was the rent money.

He rose slowly and stumbled to the emergency subway station phone. "Help me! Help me!" John shouted into the mouthpiece.

No one answered. The line was dead. John cursed, and let the phone drop. No one cares. We live in a jungle. It's every man for himself. No one cares.

John leaned against the graffiti-smeared wall and looked down the platform. A matronly-looking woman in a raincoat stood alone near the edge. She clutched a purse to her chest and eyed John suspiciously.

John sidled up to her. "Gotta match, lady?" he asked.

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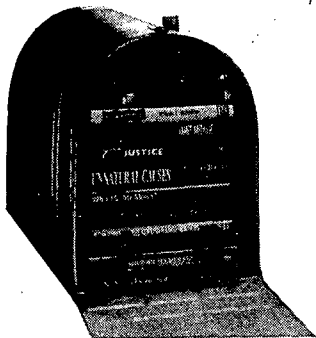
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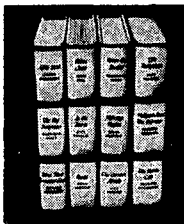
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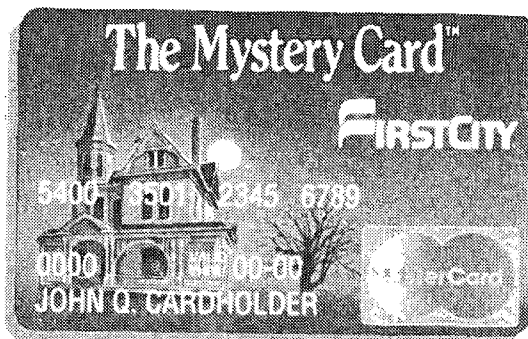
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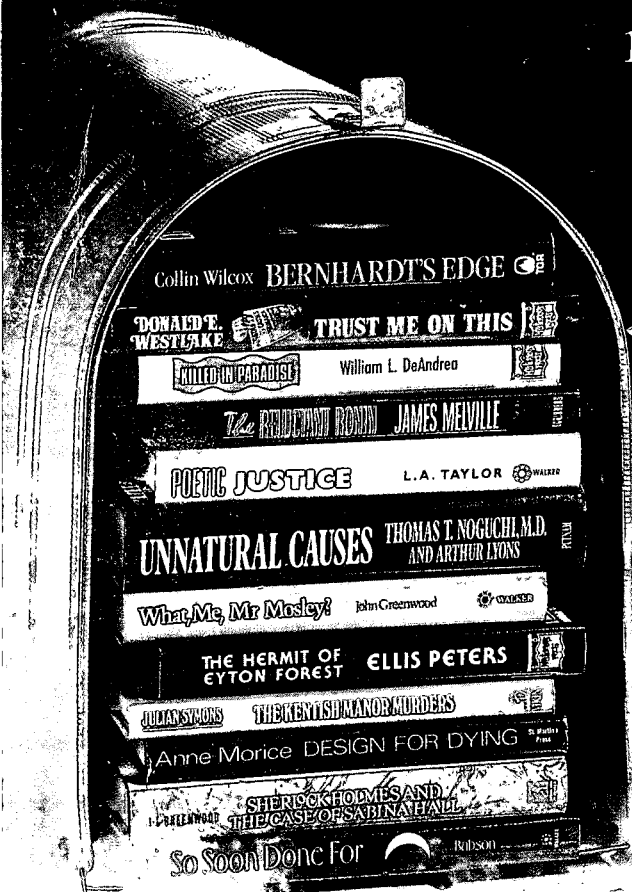
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